DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 245 CE 084 968

AUTHOR	Willis, Peter, Ed.; Neville, Bernie, Ed.
TITLE	Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education.
ISBN	ISBN-1-86355-056-9
PUB DATE	1996-00-00
NOTE	363p.; Produced by the University of South Australia, Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work. Grant towards production provided by Texts in Humanities, School of Education, University of South Australia. Papers from a qualitative research colloquium (2nd, Carleton, Victoria, April 1995).
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC15 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Adult Literacy; *Data Interpretation; Developed Nations; Developing Nations; Educational Philosophy; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Inplant Programs; Job Training; Literacy Education; Nurses; *Phenomenology; *Qualitative Research; *Research Methodology; Transformative Learning; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; Brazil; Steiner (Rudolf)

ABSTRACT

This collection of 20 papers is aimed at researchers, research students, and research supervisors interested in qualitative research into facilitated adult learning in the workplace, formal education programs, professional development, and community settings. "Introduction" (Willis) provides a summary of the papers. "Qualitative Inquiry: Meaning and Menace for Educational Researchers" (Garman) introduces two kinds of knowledge and identifies three communities of discourse inside approaches to qualitative research. The papers that follow are grouped in four loose clusters. Five papers in the first group have a commonality around social elements in adult learning, education, and research: "On Becoming a Meditator: Reflections on Adult Learning and Social Context" (McIntyre); "Bread and Sex: Learning in Brazilian Women's Organizations" (Foley); "Learning Centers and Community Houses: Twelve More Years" (Neville); "Ethics of Ethics Committees" (Crotty); and "Contribution of Dr. Rudolf Steiner to Adult Education: Australian Perspective" (Stehlik). These three papers in the second group are concerned with elements of interpretation in various forms of qualitative research: "Multi-Storied Approach to the Analysis and Interpretation of Interview Transcript Data" (Grant); "Archetypal Investigation of the Experience of Infertility in Women: Observations Drawn from a Ph.D. in Progress" (Fiske); and "Enquiry into Writing in the Process of Transformation" (Coates). These five papers in the third group deal with the theory and practice of phenomenology: "Difficulties of Using Phenomenology: Novice Researcher's Experience" (Ehrich); "Representation and Interpretation in Phenomenological Research" (Willis); "Capturing the Experience of the Clinical Nurse Specialist through Phenomenology" (Borbasi); "Hidden Spaces of Adult Literacy Education: Phenomenological Study of Personal Transformation" (Campbell); and "Doing Phenomenology" (Crotty). These six papers in the last section focus on elements of qualitative

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research practice: "Visible Politics: Postgraduate Study and Adult Education Research" (Shore); "John Thomas, the Meno, and Research" (Claydon); "At Sea Beginning to Do Qualitative Research from and for Whom does Knowing and the Known Emanate?" (Arnold); "Reflections on the Role of an Evaluator" (Harris); "Course Design as Action Research" (Mulligan); and "Autobiography, Experiential Learning, and Discourse in Context: A Thesis in Evolution" (Waterhouse). An index is appended. (YLB)

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David Lovell Publishing

Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education

Edited by

Peter Willis and Bernie Neville

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First published in 1996 by
David Lovell Publishing
PO Box 822
Ringwood Victoria 3134

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University of South Australia 1996

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Cover design by David Cope
Layout and formatting by The Prism Group
Production assisted by a grant from Texts in Humanities, University of South Australia

Printed and binding by the University of South Australia Document and Publications Unit

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education

Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 1 86355 056 9.

1. Adult education — Research — Australia. I. Willis, Peter 1939–
II. Neville, Bernard 1938–

University of South Australia. Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work.

374.0072094

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Preface

This final product is the fruit of the kindness and collaboration of considerable colleagues. Besides thanking the contributors for their work and our spouses and other family members for their encouragement and forbearance, the editors would like to mention the work of a number of behind-the-scenes resource people whose contribution has been considerable.

We would like to thank...

- Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work, and the Faculty of Education, University of South Australia, for assistance in production.
- Texts in Humanities, School of Education, University of South Australia, for a grant towards production.
- Nick Lainas and Fiona Underwood who proofed the contributions and liaised with the authors.
- University of South Australia, Underdale Campus Librarians: Roly Eime, Pauline Berger, Irene Doskatsch and Wendy Spurrier
- Maria Argitis from the School of Education who assisted with word processing.
- The Prism Program, Margaret Bowden and Steve Parker for proofing and layout.
- Document Services, University of South Australia, for graphics, printing and binding.

Introduction

Peter Willis

The papers assembled in this volume are the fruits of the second qualitative research colloquium held in April 1995 enriched with a small number of additional contributions from colleagues whose interests coincided with those of the project.

A group of scholars with an interest in forms of qualitative research relating to some aspect of adult education broadly understood met for two days at Medley Hall in Carlton, Victoria. The research interest included all aspects of doing, supervising and assessing qualitative research into approaches to adult education understood broadly as 'adult learning facilitation' in the many arenas of adult life and learning. As with the first collection, papers range widely over issues and interests relating to all kinds of human experience linked to one or other form of education in adulthood, from adult literacy to community education and development to forms of professional development and the research process itself.

The positivist approach to research into learning and knowing has tended to affect the questions being pursued and the ways in which responses to the questions are reported and represented. Taking a so-called quantitative approach similar to that used in physical sciences like biology or chemistry, one can ask what properties a thing has, how it is measured, what laws can be worked out which account for and predict elements of its functioning. On the other hand, one may be more interested in things as they are known, experienced and represented by humans and adopt a more qualitative stance.

When the qualitative researcher's eye moves from discovering, measuring and comparing elements like a biologist measuring animal behaviour to the world of human experience in mind and heart, a whole world emerges requiring continued discrimination in method and in representation - in the constructing of an appropriate text. Qualitative research even of the most aesthetic and humanistic kind can be reduced, even caricatured, by being locked into a scientific genre of representation and emerge as a kind of scientific report which may not be adequate to carry the nuances discovered.

Within this qualitative approach, there are several approaches driven by allied but diverse questions. The elementary question 'What is something experienced as?', or 'What is it like?', has been central to phenomenological enquiry, which attempts to portray human experience as directly as possible when the questions concern the very 'whatness' of a human experience like adult education, assessment, supervision, etc. Where the questions relate to the meaning and interpretations people have developed regarding adult education, learning and related research, using forms of analysis and comparison, such agendas are addressed through more interpretative approaches. Researchers, using this approach, collect, code and summarise the ideas that a group of people may have about something in the light of various general theories of human knowing and acting. The critical researcher may then seek to interrogate the foundations of these ideas, looking to the interests embedded in them. These general approaches, which tend to be more blurred in practice, form the foundation for the groupings of the contributions which follow.

The first paper in this text, by Noreen Garman, is what she calls a 'think piece'. It introduces many of the ideas used throughout this book. She begins her paper by introducing two kinds of knowledge - definitional and discursive, the discursive notion being linked to so-called 'communities of discourse'.

Three such communities are identified inside approaches to qualitative research. The first are the post-positivists who pursue forms of qualitative research using much of the positivist language of objectivity, validity and reliability. The second group which she calls the constuctivists, includes interpretevists and phenomenologists concerned with portrayal rather than analysis. The final group are the critical theorists whose research interests tend to focus on questions of power and interests in social life. Each of these communities has then the difficult task of establishing criteria for 'good' research in their approach.

The papers that follow are grouped in four loose clusters. The first group have a commonality around social elements in adult learning, education and research. The second are concerned with elements of interpretation in various forms of qualitative research. The third is concerned with the theory and practice of phenomenology and the last section is focused on elements of qualitative research practice.

John McIntyre's paper on becoming a meditator, explores what he calls adult learning and the significance of its social context. He wants to bring back the social as an essential element in constituting human action, in this case human learning. He is concerned with the tendency among adult education writers to lose a sense of the embeddedness of adult learning in social experience. He suggests that interpretative research in adult education needs to return to context, to phenomenology, to naturalism and to critical approaches seeking to account for the influence of socio-political interests on adult education.

The second in this cluster, Griff Foley's paper on learning in women's organisations, looks at adult education and learning as a part of various social movements. This is based on the insights that organised adult education practices reflect the interest and politics of their sponsors and, at the same time, that social movements have educational processes which sustain the ideals of the movement which sponsors them and continuously interpret and re-interpret the lifeworld of the participants in response to new cultural-political influences in the social environment. Foley sets up questions concerning the dialectical relations between a social movement, the adult learning taking place within it, and ways in which this ongoing interaction can be mapped and modified. The movement he explores is that of Brazilian women's organisations during transitions from military dictatorship to democracy. He examines the processes used and comments on how adult education understood as 'facilitated learning related processes' is both influenced by, and exerts influence on, the social processes of the movement.

The third paper in this cluster moves from the movement of Brazilian political reform to the micro-world of Australian local community life. Its author, Bernie Neville, begins with an institution - the neighbourhood house. While neighbourhood houses offered a range of learning - facilitative processes from basic skills in cooking and carpentry to reading and writing English, and various matters to do with health and community relations - they also saw themselves as a major player in implementing social change to wrest more social control and autonomy from centralised bureaucracies to the local community. Neville's interest in learning in and through community action is directly linked to forms of action research in which learning is pursued in and through the social action - either supportive and in-house or collective action on external forces of government or other interests exerting force on them.

The meshing of action and learning in the research environment of the neighbourhood-house environment is in marked contrast to the research environment of the university, the focus of Michael Crotty's paper, which has a stronger emphasis on producing artefacts of its research endeavour. These are produced to be read and critiqued by people in the outside world and often exert considerable social and political influence which can attract many reactions, including appreciation, dismay, hostility and occasionally litigation. Michael Crotty's paper explores the role of research ethics committees, which are set up to oversee university research. His question concerns the role of such ethics committees, the assumptions guiding their practice and the scope of their capacity to foster ethical approaches to research.

Tom Stehlik has been researching the contribution of Rudolf Steiner to adult education. Since the Steiner schools, or Waldorf Schools as they are often known, are always located within a community of parents, the continuing process of meeting, establishing and maintaining a school according to Steiner principles is always an adult process in which the children's learning is embedded. Stehlik's paper is an exploration of possible methodologies which will position his research adequately. As a parent with children in a Steiner school and a member of its adult support community, he is interested in exploring modes of qualitative research which will incorporate his own experience and history.

The second part of this collection has four papers grouped loosely under their common interest in the interpretation process.

Audrey Grant, the first writer in this section, explores the process of interpretation of various texts generated in much qualitative research. She wants to avoid the teaching process by which rich human experience becomes reduced and impoverished by analysis according to one approach or method. She draws on her own work on literacy, using three relating approaches, three ways of conceptualising and viewing the field. She sees these three ways as based on three analogies - firstly life as narrative, secondly, literacy as social practices and finally, language as textual discourse. Her concern is to use three approaches to avoid the weaknesses which can emerge from the exclusive use of one. Thus while supporting the value of personal narrative approaches, she wants to avoid the danger of self reference and a kind of personal narcissism by complementary narrative with critical approaches which look for the interests embedded in forms of practice. To complement this second approach, Grant then brings in a third approach which focuses on language as social practice and discourse.

In the text Grant shows how each approach foregrounds particular dimensions of human literacy as the narrative acts of persons in the world as text makers. This multi-storied approach is an attempt to juxtapose approaches to generate a kind of complementary representation generated from different processes and perspectives moving from the micro to macro and from the personal to the social and finally to the structural (or ideological and political) dimensions of life, interpretation and explanation.

Linda Fiske explores in depth a hermeneutic approach to understanding women's ways of experiencing infertility. In her interviews with women living with infertility she used two hermeneutic questions: 'What does this experience mean?', and 'what is happening for this person?' These questions were posed from an empathetic and shared space by which the researcher attempts to enter and share the experience of infertility, with credibility and authenticity so that she could get the participant in the research to 'explore hunches and float ideas'. Fiske uses interpretative categories from archetypal psychology to locate the themes emerging from the narratives of the participants in the project. This research was linked in some way to a learning/therapeutic agenda in which participants re-visit feelings surrounding their experience of being infertile together with the range of interpretations they had made of their condition, and re-interpret them in and with the researcher.

Aileen Treloar Coates completes this section. Her approach, like Fiske's, uses the approaches and vocabulary from archetypal psychology to name various internal states of a learner in the literacy class whose progress was traumatic and spasmodic but finally highly successful. Treloar Coates refers to phenomenology more in the North American approach, referring more to the subjectivities of the experience which are correlated with various archetypes from humanistic psychology. The various writing pieces consequent on the writer's changing inner states are classified according to their style into discussive, descriptive, creative and expressive and then linked to her various internal states, i.e. critical, emotional, imaginative and transpersonal. As in the previous study, Treloar Coates' research is also a narrative of the transformative effect of the educative process she pursued.

The next five papers deal with approaches to phenomenological research.

Lisa Ehrich's paper, the first in this cluster, concerns the challenges in pursuing classic phenomenology. She explores the four 'celebrated themes' of Merleau-Ponty (who, with Husserl and Heidegger, was a founding father of this movement), namely, description, reduction, essences and intentionality. Her struggle is to see how a social science method can be illumined by this philosophical approach. She then examines how phenomenology has been used in social science research. She identifies theoretical texts, social research texts and psychological texts which use this approach. She points out that the third group - the psychological texts - are noticeable in that they have spent time on developing a method and even within that method a technique which others could follow. She then examines Giorgi's approach in some detail since, as she puts it, 'he was instrumental in translating phenomenological psychology to a rigorous and legitimate methodology'. Ehrich then moves the conversation back to her own choice of method, writing, 'Before I decide to play a small or big part in enabling others to change their world, I believe I should understand their world.' Her paper concludes with this as a valid project.

Peter Willis' paper, the second in this section, revisits the classical phenomenological project to go back to 'the things themselves'. The paper explores the challenge of portraying a lived experience (in this case adult education practice) which is both received as a phenomenon - something a person can look at, contemplate - and constructed as a planned activity. Adult education is both a 'happening' experience and a 'deliberate' experience. This double identity is at the heart of the phenomenological project which wants to look at what was experienced when a planned course of action was pursued. Willis' paper is concerned with exploring ways to portray, or represent (to use Eisner's term), a lived experience which can 'carry' the range of ideas, feelings, passions, images which may be present in a lived experience. He proposes a method of dramatic presentation which brings together backgrounding, sketching, poetising and distilling as four complementary processes working to this task. He then provides an example of the four processes exploring adult education practice in an Aboriginal community development program.

Sally Borbasi's text looks at using phenomenology to capture the experience of specialist clinical nurses to portray the flavour and complexity of their actual experience in their working life. Her study, built on the framework developed by van Manen, provides a very real comprehensive and textured picture of nurses' work. Borbasi's working with the reality of nurses' experience discovers an experience shaped by certain repressive 'elements' in the context of their practical lives so that the detailed living representation of the expert nurses' experience shows that, to a greater or lesser extent, their personal and professional survival is pursued in a permanent climate of considerable difficulties.

Beverley Campbell's paper is an investigation of personal transformation generated in the course of adult literacy education. She uses an eclectic approach drawing on the symbolic interactionist form of phenomenology and seeking the meanings and interpretations which can be discovered in the idea - or, as she says, the phenomenon - of personal transformation. Here the meaning of phenomenon refers to a recurrent conclusion the researcher draws from various forms of evidence from the researched interviewees. The main thrust of the study is thus an attempt to work back from evidence of personal transformation to the processes that generated the transformation or, better, made it possible, i.e. 'how the context was being created for new understanding to take place, and how this in turn precipitated a process of personal change'.

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Campbell's study exposed four processes. The first was to look at the metaphors of literacy that teacher and learner were using. The second was to look at autobiographies of students who reported themselves transformed, looking here for significant metaphors. The third was to look at the ideas or metaphors of the social identity of the non-literate learners provided by society and their acceptance or rejection by the adult learner seeking to become literate. The final element was the changing concept of the self. Campbell shows the research process to be similar to solving a giant mystery through which she moves, via written analysis, trial and error, to a discovery space where she is able to announce certain themes - which she prefers to call enabling spaces - which are conducive to transformative learning. The first is the changing metaphors of literacy. Then there are the changing ideas about change, the fact that life apart from literacy study is undergoing considerable transition, the change in the person's acceptance of moving from being non literate to literate, and the influence of the learning context itself which is favourable to change. The final part of this paper deals with the collaborative style of this investigative study.

Finally, in this section, Michael Crotty writes of 'Doing phenomenology'. He points, first, to the kind of phenomenology to be found in the traditional phenomenological movement. It is a phenomenology which asks us to lay aside inherited and prevailing understandings in order to return 'to the things themselves', i.e. to revisit the object of our immediate experience and see what it strikes us as being. He points out the palpable differences between that phenomenology and the phenomenology typically presented in the textbooks and research journals of the English-speaking world. Far from asking us to put our inherited and prevailing understandings in abeyance, the latter invites us to explore these understandings by way of people's narrated experiences. As Crotty sees it, the value to be found in the more traditional form of phenomenology lies especially in its critical character, for it comprehensively and doggedly calls into question all that we take for granted. Crotty proposes a stepwise method and a practical technique for doing phenomenology of that kind.

The final part of this collection groups texts concerned with elements of qualitative research practice.

Sue Shore's paper looks at the politics implicit in research and explores a process by which a researcher may become aware of and acknowledge the political commitments and discriminations made in the research writing process. She uses a 'double dialogue' process, which reveals itself by way of a parallel righthand column presenting a continuing reflective critique on the main argument offered elsewhere in the article. Shore's reflection centres on how she generated her analysis of ethnographic accounts emanating from time spent in an adult literacy classroom observing a colleague over some weeks of practice. She explains how the practical demands of the situated research and the influence of the real relations between her and the teacher she was observing created considerable tension with her research ideals and preset strategies.

Leslie Claydon's paper, the second in this section, is a reflective revisiting of the educative processes involved in exchanges between post graduate researchers and their academic mentors. As he suggests later in the paper, 'judgement on a candidate's work is also a reflection upon those appointed to guide its author'. He explores in depth questions about how a research topic is located and its scope reduced to manageable proportions and what costs are involved. Claydon brings a philosophical eye to this process of 'cutting a project down to size' and poses questions as to what one ends up researching if, in the interests of 'manageability' and 'setting limits' one ends up removing from view essential elements of the entity being researched. Underlying this essay is a serious warning to the academy which has moved over time a long way from explorations of general philosophical themes underpinning academic practice to more shallow and eclectic approaches.

Claydon's measured reflections with the colour and texture of many years in the academy is in marked contrast to the following brief paper by Teresa Arnold, a beginning postgraduate researcher. Whereas Claydon is concerned with the process of delineation of foregrounding and backgrounding in setting up a manageable and valid project, Arnold is concerned with her own, as it were, self-delineation, as she becomes aware of her changing self and her taking on and being changed by the researcher's role.

Roger Harris' study on the role of the evaluator looks to the research dimensions of evaluation which tries to involve the researched in a process which is self-reflective and self-modifying. One of his agendas is to provide ways in which the experiences of the project he is evaluating can be represented consistently. He uses triangulation by linking replies to questions in questionnaires to similar questions pursued in interviews and focus groups. The artefact of such evaluative research has tended, as in this case, to be a balanced report on the outcomes of a process established with a set of objectives. As such, the report can include some accounts of the experiences from participants but needs to focus on the products and outcomes, planned and unplanned, welcome and unwelcome. Harris' paper is written as an action research report on this experience and role as evaluator. He keeps his own experience of being in the 'hot spot' to a minimum but mentions more objectivised points: the value of triangulation of data gathering and the differences in perceptions and feelings of different stake-holders in the process.

Martin Mulligan's paper also takes up the action research theme, this time in relation to course design. Just as the previous paper has to be understood as integrated into the processes surrounding a substantial project, this time we are invited to read Mulligan's paper which has been circulated to the course design team and in which he summarises the processes they had been part of, linking them to theoretical ideas about the learning organisation and ideas about cultural change as applied to organisations. The narrative embeds course design in its *Realpolitik*. Beside academic questions and those to do with the ideas, theories and components of the social ecology curriculum, there are the allied questions of the staff, staff engagement and staff workloads and questions relating to students, their needs and their responses to the proposed changes. Again it is a narrative of events and will no doubt be complemented by future, more historical, narratives which will catch how these planned and negotiated changes impacted on people's lived lives.

The question of the location of the researcher is taken up in the final paper from Peter Waterhouse. Waterhouse is concerned not only with the location of the researcher but with the modes of representation in which researchers, as autobiographers, portray their professional lives in their various experiences as sites of reflective research. As Waterhouse says, it is about 'my own learning rather than that of the subjects I encountered on the way'. His project, which has Australian resonances to Nod Miller's book on her learning life as a professional adult educator in Britain, looks at the autobiographical method. His plan is to journey through periods and episodes of his professional life looking at his learning during those times and at the range of social and cultural forces in dialogue with which, and in resistance to which, he constructed his professional practice.

What Waterhouse, in concluding, says of his paper can be said of this collection as a whole. It too has no definitive closure. It is very much 'work in progress' from which further work is to be expected.

Part One

Foundations

Chapter 1

Qualitative Inquiry: Meaning and menace for educational researchers

Noreen Garman

Introduction

First, let me thank John Smyth for the invitation to introduce today's meeting. It is a challenge indeed to attempt to capture something of this relatively new field called qualitative inquiry (new, that is, to education). The field is so eclectic at this point that it is difficult to imagine what background people in an audience bring to it. Please forgive me if I am addressing issues you already have considered, but my hope is that after my presentation we can begin a conversation, and throughout the day we can carry the discourse into new ideas and issues related to qualitative research.

Let me begin with a brief mention of my interest in qualitative research. At the University of Pittsburgh it is generally recognized that quantitative research is the major mode of inquiry. The School of Education has a renown program in Educational Research, and in that program the meaning of research is associated with quantitative approaches. Early in the 1980's I was a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Supervision. Some of my doctoral students and I formed a dissertation study group so that we might learn about "alternative" research approaches which would fit their modes of inquiry. We weren't certain at the time what to call our study group. At that time the American Educational Research Association (AERA) had begun to differentiate two kinds of dissertations for their awards: *empirical and conceptual*. Other than the labels, however, AERA offered no description of what these two categories meant. So we picked up on the term "conceptual" and began to study what it might mean for dissertation research in education.

This group of eight students used grounded theory and case study methods as the basis for their inquiry. I mention this because, in 1980 the US educational research community had not yet begun to use the term *qualitative* as their designation of an alternative to what they were calling empirical research.

During the latter part of the decade the interest in qualitative, and in particular, narrative inquiry, exploded. The School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh began to include literacy theory, curriculum studies, and feminist studies as other cognate fields in their Ph.D. program.

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Inquiry usually starts with a series of questions. Today I would like to pose three questions. First: What do we mean by "qualitative research?" Second: How do we know good research when we see it? and Third: What are some of the recurring issues that novice researchers face when trying to write their dissertations? (The conditions often result in menacing "traps" that cause students difficulties.) I'm certain I'll not do justice to these questions, but they are important to deliberate as we go through the day.

The Meaning of Qualitative Research

I'd like to set a context by telling you about two conversations I had recently. One was a conversation with Marcy, a research assistant who works for the Research and Evaluation Department of a large urban school district in Pittsburgh. We were talking about a current project she had been assigned by the Director.

"My assignment," she said, "was to develop a survey of opinions our staff held about the Personnel Department. It seems that there had been some dissonance between the Personnel Department and the rest of the staff. The Board of Directors asked for clarification of the issues. Well, I didn't really know what the nature of the disagreements were. I didn't know much about what the Personnel Department did either, so I began to talk with people. I did formal interviews, I had conversations over lunch with people from both groups, I talked to people in the elevators. I listened to their stories about important incidents. By the time I had to construct the items for the survey. I knew more about the Personnel Department and the situation with the staff than I ever imagined. It was rich stuff. Somehow, however, when I began to put it into abstract form for the items on the survey, though, it was lifeless and didn't really get to the heart of the matter."

I asked her why she felt that she couldn't use the rich data for her research results, instead of findings from a survey instrument.

"My boss," she answered, "really only believes that quantitative data is full blown research. If I reported the results of all the narrative data, that would only be my own interpretations. The survey would *verify* that the respondents really hold certain views. It would be more objective. I'm really frustrated, though, because the findings on the survey really don't get to the heart of the matter." She repeated several times, "it doesn't get to the heart of the issues."

A few days later one of my colleagues in the Educational Psychology Department came into my office. She's a nationally known researcher who has received million dollar grants to do research in her field. She told about one of her doctoral students who has a profound personal story to draw on for her dissertation. It seems her student, Alma, has cancer and during her lengthy treatment Alma began to notice how her own learning capacity had changed and how difficult it was for those who worked with her to understand the changes. She wanted to portray the special learning disability which occurs as a result of the treatment for a terminal patient. My colleague wondered whether an autobiographical approach would be considered "real" research. I assured her that, indeed, it was a perfectly respectable genre for dissertation research. (One of my students had just finished an autobiographical study which her committee had called "a stunning piece of work".) My colleague was both relieved and sceptical. It was clear . . . she was not quite convinced that autobiography is a legitimate approach for research. She kept saying, "but I just want to be certain that it is acceptable. After all, it's *just* a personal account."

In both of these conversations the issue is legitimacy. **What forms of representation are considered legitimate as knowledge?** What constitutes legitimate research? Since the emergence of interest in qualitative research, questions of this kind continue to shape the discourse.

In our search for a good definition or description of qualitative research, we, in our modernist way, look for references that will give us the perimeters of the concept. Precise definitions, after all, are important in research, even if they are temporary. But in post-modern terms, we make the distinction between *definitional* knowing and *discursive* knowing. That is, that discursive meanings are found in the discourses that are carried on in a field or topic. The meanings are embedded in those debates that continue over time. Yvonne Lincoln (co-author of the Handbook on Qualitative Research) says that the most frequent question she's asked is, "What can I read, what's a good basic piece I can read." Her answer is, "There isn't a single book. There are probably 30 basic ones to help the researcher be conversant with the controversy." I would again emphasize that the current controversy stems from the concern for the legitimacy of research and the meaning of qualitative research is embedded in those discourses.

Although educational researchers have conducted qualitative studies for decades, their work was not part of an established field of inquiry with procedures and university courses to provide guidance and structure. Except for the ethnographic tradition in anthropology and the University of Chicago style of case studies in sociology in the US and the action research efforts in the UK, there were few accepted models to which educational researchers with a qualitative bent could turn for direction prior to 1980. The psychometric model long dominated educational research, as it has generally dominated the social and behavioural sciences. If professors and their students departed from it, they invited scorn, if not rejection. To conduct experiments and surveys was to be scientific: to do otherwise was to be soft, wrong, or muddle headed. (Eisner & Peshkin 1990). By 1980 even the positivist psychometricians were beginning to feel the constraints of their tight models of generating knowledge. Many of these researchers, now referred to as post-positivists, began to accept, at least in part, the place that language has in shaping human existence and reluctantly acknowledged the possibility that all human reality is socially constructed. The term *qualitative* meant exploring the broader understanding possible in natural conversations and narratives.

Thus, in the early 80's the term qualitative, to some, meant the attention to language, even though they adhered to the press for scientific-like models for assuring validity and reliability for the sake of objectivity. In other words, they acknowledged that in quantitative research, the good may be found in fidelity to design, whereas qualitative research is relatively lacking in canons and conventions. The good is more elusive because qualitative procedures are more idiosyncratic. And although there was debate early on which centred on "quantitative vs. qualitative," this is *not* the centre of the controversies in qualitative research.(1) I would suggest, however, that it was this early debate that gave us the unfortunate name, "qualitative" as a contrast to the dominant mode of inquiry using mathematical formula to insure rigorous science. It is unfortunate that the term serves only to confuse the novice researcher. What is clear, however, is that the controversies cannot be reduced to two contrasting positions, quantitative vs qualitative, or even to a single set of polar types. The debate involves multiple issues. A wide variety of positions have been adopted by discourse communities who share common ideologies and judge each others work. Handout #1 articulates some of these important issues. [Issues Embedded in the Qualitative Debates. (Hammersley 1989)].

I mentioned the term "discourse communities" who claim to be doing qualitative inquiry. In educational research these communities generally are associated with three camps. Soltis (1983) labels the research approaches associated with these camps as *empirical, interpretive,* and *critical* inquiry. Yvonne Lincoln (1994) calls Soltis' first group post-positivist qualitative researchers who adhere to the principles of objectivity, validity and reliability as their canons for rigorous findings. Miles and Huberman (1984) would be an example of those scholars who advocate empirical qualitative methods of data analysis as the centerpiece for what they consider to be rigorous research.

Lincoln labels the second group "constructivists", a term now recognized in cognitive psychology (even though the cognitive psychologists at the University of Pittsburgh still remain post-positivist in their focus.) The basic tenet of constructivism includes the notion that we construct our realities, for the most part in interpretive communities. Other descriptors for this camp include interpretivists or phenomenologists. Their works grow out of a hermeneutic orientation based on interpretation and the search for deeper understanding. I probably identify most with this group. This group tends to feel that the post-positivists have co-opted the term "qualitative" and, furthermore, that the post-positivists ignore issues of the theoretic, or world view orientation of the researcher, focusing primarily on method, or rather techniques for managing data. The constructivists/interpretivists argue that the theoretic perspective one takes is central to one's inquiry. They have very different concerns about what constitutes good designs, how one portrays the phenomenon under study and what kinds of standards for authenticity, rigor or trustworthiness might be usefully acquired and judged. Issues of portrayal, or what Eisner (1993) calls forms of representation, are central to this kind of research reporting. I call your attention to the second handout. [Six Features of Qualitative Studies, Eisner 1991].

The third group of people are referred to as the criticalists. As Lincoln (1994) says, they might not call themselves that, but they are known as critical theorists. (Lincoln says they jump on each other a lot, much of it in a friendly way.) Neo-marxists and feminist scholars are often associated with critical theorists; however the group is extremely diverse and has in common a proclivity to direct the purposes of their research to questions about social, historical, political, gender and/or economic forces. Their uses of these theoretic lenses to examine the situations under study give rise to the name critical theorists. John Smyth is often named as a leading critical theorist.

It is important to note that within these three broad camps there are substrands based on method (eg., ethnography, symbolic interactionism, grounded theory) which are often, but not always, identified with disciplines (anthropology, sociology) or fields of study in education (curriculum studies, teacher education). Each of these discourse communities take their own perspectives on judging the "goodness" of qualitative research. These three perspectives are, of course, loose constructions of the educational research community orientations and are seldom found in their purist forms.(2)

All of these controversies, about what constitutes qualitative research, what ought to be the focus of research, what ought to be the **canons** for judging the research, all of these issues are cast within an overarching conflict between modernists' and postmodernists' perspectives. Depending on who you read, there are many claims. Much of the postmodern scholarship is esoteric, to say the least, but I call your attention to two articles which were printed in the *New York Times.* Written by Vaclav Havel (1992, 1994), president of the Czech Republic, they elegantly describe the argument for the end of the modern era and the challenge of post-modernism.(3)

There are a few tenets that post-modernists will agree to. The first is that science cannot make claims to ultimate truth. Science simply cannot make what are called totalizing or grand narratives. That leads then to another assertion about the post-modern world and that is that all knowledge is partial, or what hard scientists would call, perspectable . . . that one takes a perspective toward the world one is studying. And the third tenet is that knowledge always comes from a person who holds a social location. For this reason many research pieces begin with a narrative of the researcher's social location. In addition, educators are turning their attention to questions of justice and compassion. As we move into the post-modern era, we move into a new stage of the human struggle to evolve as a moral being. As Anderson (1990) points out:

> *In post-modern terms we do not - as so many fear - cease to be moral animals and slide into hedonistic or savage normlessness. But neither are we subservient to the various holy tablets containing eternal prescriptions about what we should or should not do. It ceases to be a secret that morality is socially defined, and with the revelation of that secret, a conviction is born in the minds of many - for example Marx and Foucault - that social definitions or morality are power grabs and conspiracies.* (pp. 153,154)

Thus, in the post-modern sense, scholars have turned away from the rational/technical explanations of knowledge claims and toward heuristic understandings reflected in debate and discussion. As a result there is a revival of interest in rhetoric and philosophy. Human inquiry has entered a "new situation" where the convictions and orientations have traditionally marked the separation of rhetoric, with its focus on persuasion, and philosophy with its concern for truth claims. These two have begun to converge on a new space that can be found through the central term *discourse*. (Angus & Langdorf 1993). A major theme in post-modernism is the need to create spaces for the here-to-for unheard voices and positions in human inquiry.

On Determining the "Quality" of Qualitative Research

As I mentioned earlier the discourse regarding qualitative research is relatively new in education. One important question which is raised in the discourse is "How do we judge the quality, or the "goodness" of qualitative research?" Early on, education scholars attempted to make criteria from "scientific" forms of inquiry fit qualitative research. It has been argued by Phillips, Goetz & LeCompte, and others, that criteria such as validity, reliability, generalizability, can serve to judge the significance of qualitative research if we adjust the meaning of these concepts slightly. Actually they argue that all research should be subjected to similar criteria.

Jerome Bruner, in his important book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, begins to establish a clear distinction between research which attempts to be scientific and research which is grounded in qualitative approaches. He argues that these two inquiry approaches emerge from two different modes of thought which he calls *paradigmatic* and *narrative*.

He describes the difference as follows:

> *There are two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought.*
>
> *Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification. A good story and a well-formed argument are different in natural kinds. Both can be used for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establish-*

> *ing formal and empirical proof. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude.* (p.11, emphasis mine.)

Over the years my colleague, Maria Piantanida, and I have generated criteria to address the question. "How do we judge the *quality* of qualitative research?" (Various scholars have offered similar characteristics for judging good research.) We find these criteria particularly useful in helping doctoral students assess their work. Criteria of quality for judging qualitative research are presented here as follows:

Verite	Does the work ring true? Is it consistent with accepted knowledge in the field? Or, if it departs, does it address why? Does it fit within the discourse in the appropriate literature? Is it intellectually honest and authentic?
Integrity	(as in architecture). Is the work structurally sound? Does it hang together? Is the research rationale logical, appropriate, and identifiable within an inquiry tradition?
Rigor	Is there sufficient depth of intellect, rather than superficial or simplistic reasoning? Are the portrayals sound?
Utility	Is the work useful and professionally relevant? Does it make a contribution to the field? Does the piece have a clearly recognizable professional audience?
Vitality	Is it important, meaningful . . .non-trivial? Does it have a sense of vibrancy, intensity, excitement of discovery? Is the proper personae (or voice) used for the author(s) and other participants? Do metaphors, images, visuals communicate powerfully?
Aesthetics	Is it enriching, pleasing to anticipate and experience? Does it give me insight into some universal part of my educational self? Does it touch my spirit in some way?
Ethics	Is there evidence that privacy and dignity have been afforded all participants? Has the inquiry been conducted in a careful and honest way? Does the inquiry have an ethical sensibility?

Verisimilitude	Does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognizable as "truly conceivable experience?" (Bruner).

These criteria have served us (my colleagues and students) well as a language for describing and assessing qualitative research. However, any articulation of criteria is tenuous. We continue to remind ourselves that each piece of research must be judged within the context of the community of scholars it represents. Perhaps the most important consideration is the unique intent the author seeks to achieve, the worthiness of the effort and the extent to which he/she accomplishes the challenge.

Recurring Issues and Menacing Traps

So far this presentation has grappled with the meaning of qualitative research as well as "good" qualitative research. I have attempted to give a flavour of the conversations and debates that make up the field. It is clear that researchers have remarkable freedom now to choose various forms of representation for their inquiry. We have available to us other genres besides the scientific report. We have the freedom to shape uniquely creative studies. At the same time exercising this freedom places special demands on the researcher as well as those judging the merits of the research. This is a particular challenge to those of us who are guiding doctoral students in their dissertation study. Over the past ten years I have had the opportunity to supervise several creative and exciting dissertations and to serve on numerous dissertation committees. I've kept notes and a journal of the experiences in both guiding dissertations and serving on committees. From my notes I've become interested in recurring issues which result in what I call the menacing traps that doctoral students fall into when they come to write their documents. These are patterns that seem to repeat often in my notes. I only have time to mention some of these issues and precautions. Hopefully they will serve to call attention to difficulties in other than dissertation research.

Dysfunctional stereotypes of research

Novice researchers carry with them a folklore of what constitutes legitimate research. Without recognizing the inchoate assumptions that guide their thinking, students often write their reports in ways that sound like what they believe research ought to be. There is a prevailing notion that the dissertation must resemble a scientific report and students often use awkward language which is supposed to reflect this scientific-like stance. (A popular dysfunctional stereotype is the notion that the researcher can never use the first person in the narrative. It is less scholarly to use "I".) It is vitally important that novice researchers recognize the research stereotypes they carry with them. Most important is the need for the novice researcher to find his/her "voice" in the research.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Research method as "how-to-manipulate data".

When students begin to develop their research rationale, they often interpret the rationale as "research method" or "research methodology" (which is a misuse of the term, since methodology literally means the study of method.) In any case, students tend to use the term method in its most narrow sense, as a how-to-manipulate data. Smith and Heshusius (1996) point out that method can be characterized in a least two ways. The most common meaning is method as procedures or techniques. The second characterization of method is as "logic of justification." It is important that students recognize that the focus here is not on the how-to-do-it, but rather on the elaboration of logical issues and concepts and, ultimately, on the justifications that inform the inquiry. Philosophic perspectives are important here, such as epistemology, ontology and axiology. The research rationale involves such basic questions as, "How is truth to be defined? "(epistemology): "What is the nature of social and educational reality? What is the relationship of the researcher to the researched?" (ontology); and, "What values are embedded in the approach?" (axiology). A thoughtful logic of justification is important for qualitative research.

Research rationale as a negative statement

Students often feel obliged to contrast their research principles with those of quantitative methods, stating that they are ***not*** following a particular set of canons but rather ***are*** following "alternative" principles related to qualitative research. It may be a way for them to argue against some vague notion of research, neglecting to think through their own epistemology, ontology and axiology. It is here that students are advised that they need not enter a qualitative/quantitative debate. They need to say what it is that they ***are*** doing, rather than what they ***are not*** doing. Students need to see their research rationale as a positive rather than a negative statement. This is where the logic of justification becomes an important feature.

Mistaking data collection questions for guiding research questions

Students operating out of the folklore of a standardized proposal format often fall into the trap of submitting a vaguely conceptualized "fishing expedition" or a narrowly formulated hypothesis as part of their proposal. They often minimize the role of formulating guiding questions that will serve to organize the research procedures as well as the dissertation itself. More problematic is the tendency for students to mistake the data collection questions for the questions that guide their research. If they have solid guiding research questions for their research proposal, they tend to forget the research questions that they have framed when they begin to write the dissertation. Students fail to recognize that they can use the research questions as possible organizers of the chapters, even as major chapter headings. They seem to get the data collected and then say, "How do I write this up?" or rather "How do I analyze the data?". They often go to the classic dissertations and find most chapter headings follow a formula. (Chapter Three is Methodology: Chapter Four, Analysis of Data: Chapter 5, Summary and Conclusion.) With this formula Chapter Four becomes an amorphous presentation of qualitative data. Students often forget to go back to the questions and use them (or reframe them, if need be). They have a difficult time when they are told: "You cannot fall back on any typical chapter headings for organization. You must create your own." For this reason it's more useful for students to think of their dissertation process as writing a book rather than writing a scientific report.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Confusion as to the purpose of the review of literature

Students are often confused as to how a review of literature is supposed to serve their research. In qualitative research there is initially a review of the discourses (and discourse communities) associated with their topic. The review provides a historical perspective on the topic as well as a source for future interpretations of the data. Often literature is considered as part of the data for a qualitative study.

"I only need to do a Review of the Literature one time and then forget it."

Often students hold onto the old saw that they need to write the first three chapters of their dissertation and submit that as the proposal. They review literature for the proposal document and then assume they don't need to go back to the literature again once it's in place. Two students at the University of Pittsburgh recently tried to interpret their data solely from their own experience. They didn't return to the literature to get a richer interpretation for

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their portrayals; consequently their portrayals were rather vapid. If they had done further rounds of interpretation using good scholarly work from the literature, they would have been better off. In one case a student was claiming that she was grounding her work in critical theory. She reviewed the theorists in Chapter Two and then didn't use the theoretic literature in the interpretations and portrayals of the narratives in subsequent chapters.

The opposite of the above): "I'm desperate to know what to make of my data. Maybe the literature will help."

When students are faced with mounds of data from a variety of sources, they often are overwhelmed with the prospects of making sense out of the awesome "stuff". Instead of immersing one's self in the data in order to create portrayals, students often continue to go to the library to read more and more, in *finitum*, hoping that something will help with the creative part . . . that is, creating portrayals from their data.

Mode of inquiry: explanation/interpretation vs. verification/prove

Almost all of the qualitative dissertations presented this term in the School of Education had signs of the "verification" trap. Somehow students hadn't internalized the notion that they were *not* using the qualitative statements from their interviews to *verify* that something was happening . . . to prove that their phenomenon was really there. This is a subtle, but very real trap. Students fail to grasp the notion that qualitative statements are supposed to be used to illuminate, to explain, to interpret, and not to verify. They seem to assume that because two or three people have made similar statements, that *proves x*. Students need to internalize the notion that the essential mode of inquiry of qualitative research is for portraying deeper understanding, not for verification of the phenomenon under study.

What gives me the right to make this interpretation? What if what I say isn't right?

Students are often timid when it comes to moving from their data to ultimately making their own interpretations. They are somehow convinced that they are not allowed to have their own scholarly position. It is the role of the dissertation advisor to help their students give themselves permission to interpret and take a defensible stance.

Last chapter fatigue

Students inevitably run out of time and/or energy (usually both) by the time they get to the last chapter(s) where they must deal with the "so what?" of the research, as well as the "now what?". Students often spend a lot of space on a Summary section, rehashing the study. Inevitably their Committee members send them back to "give more depth and insight to the discussion." Frequently one of the sections of the dissertation is "Implications for Practice (or Policy)", and this section needs to be well thought out. Students often don't leave enough time in their research schedule to do adequate revisions. They are disappointed to learn that the first submitted draft is seldom accepted. Constant revision is a crucial part of the writing process. *It is generally accepted that qualitative dissertations take longer to finish than do traditional quantitative studies.*

Mainly, students need to see their drafts as an ongoing process. They need to have others review the conceptualizing and writing and avoid coming to a meeting with a fully-written document without the realization that revisions are a way of life in qualitative research. In qualitative research the researcher acquires a mindset for "ongoingness" rather than "full blownness" in their writing.

The "ongoingness of research writing" is played out in such activities as a writing study group. In the study group with which I am currently engaged there are students doing their dissertations and there are those who have finished and are attempting to publish articles. One student is working on a book. We meet every two weeks and critique each other's work. It is a challenge, yet also represents a genuine discourse community.

In Conclusion

The decade of the 80's has seen a revolution in thinking about the basis of educational inquiry and practice. As Clifford Geertz (1980) announced at the beginning of the decade, "Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think." Qualitative research is one of those ways. I was asked recently to describe the approach to my own qualitative research. As I thought about how I would answer that, I was reminded of Clarissa Estes (1992) telling the story of the myth of La Loba. It goes something like this:

> *There is an old woman who lives in a hidden place that everyone knows, but few have ever seen . . . The sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. Her cave is filled with the*

> *bones of all manner of creatures . . . and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, she lays out the bones carefully on the ground. When the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing . . . And when she is sure, she stands over the 'criatura,' raises her arms over it, and sings out. That is when the rib bones and leg bones begin to flesh out and the creature becomes furred. La Loba sings more, and more of the creature begins to breathe. It finally opens its eyes, leaps up and runs down the canyon* (p.27).

NOTES

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2. One set of battles took place at the International Conference on Alternative Paradigms for Inquiry, sponsored by Indiana University and Phi Delta Kappan. It was directed by Egon Guba and held on March 25-26, 1989 in San Francisco. Ned Gage (1989) noted that the conference proceedings described the debate on paradigms as "characterized by jockeying for position and the carving out of territory, sometimes resulting in *ad hominem* attacks and charges of lack of integrity . . . sometimes acrimonious but always lively." Gage continues:" In 2 days of lectures and discussions, more that 200 partisans struggled with paradigmatic issues. The conference ended with the expectations of more such strenuous engagements (p.10.)" By the 1994 American Educational Research Association in New Orleans the acrimony had subsided, but the debates continued. One popular session, titled "Yes, But Is It Research? Alternative Perspectives on Paradigm Proliferation Within AERA" featured a panel of well known scholars in the field of qualitative research. The audience overflowed the ballroom and many more were turned away.

3. Although educational researchers generally agree that the field can be distinguished by three inquiry approaches known as *empirical, interpretive and critical,* scholars continue to remind us that the field is more complex and interrelated than these three. Several scholars have attempted to portray or "map" the field with more comprehensive construals. See Haggerson & Bowman [1992)]; Paulston & Liebman (1994) and; Wolcott (1992) to mention,only a few.

4. A delightfully informative book on postmodernism is Walter Truett Anderson's Reality Isn't What It Used To Be: *Theatrical Politics, Ready To Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic and Other Wonders of the Post Modern World.* 1990, San Francisco, Harper and Row Publishers.

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APPENDICES

1. Issues Embedded in the Qualitative Debates

Debates in the nascent field of qualitative research have often been characterized as "paradigm wars" between those who espouse quantitative and qualitative research. In reality the arguments cannot be easily reduced to two contrasting positions, quantitative vs. qualitative; or even to a single set of polar types. The debates involve multiple issues and a wide variety of positions have been adopted by communities of discourse through these kinds of issues. In his book *The Dilemma of Qualitative Method* Hammersley characterizes some of the important issues as follows:

a) Realism versus phenomenalism. Is there a reality independent of our ideas and experiences whose character we can come to know; or must our knowledge always and forever be only of phenomena as they appear in our experience?

b) The priority of epistemology or ontology. Must we found our investigation of the world on assumptions about how knowledge is possible or on assumptions about the nature of the world that we seek to understand?

c) Is science the only source of knowledge: or is it only one, and perhaps even an inferior one, among many sources?

d) Unity of science vs. diversity of science. Are all sciences fundamentally similar in methodology, or do they differ profoundly in both assumptions and techniques?

e) The pursuit of abstract knowledge vs. the attempt to portray reality in its immediacy and wholeness.

f) The search for laws vs. the identification of limited patterns. Is human behaviour governed by universal laws of the kind often assumed to operate in the physical world? Or is the most that we can expect the identification of limited patterns. culturally specific and/or probabilistic in character?

g) Is knowledge acquired by inventing hypotheses and testing them (the hypothetico-deductive method); or by unearthing relations among phenomena (a more inductivist or discovery-based approach?)

And in educational research, one of the most important questions is posited as follows:

a) Is it possible to generate knowledge which is value free: or is all knowledge situated in particular social, historical and political forces as reflected in the researcher's bias?

2. *Six Features of Qualitative Studies*

Excerpts from Chapter 2, "What Makes a Study Qualitative?"

in *The Enlightened Eye* by Elliot Eisner

1) **Qualitative studies tend to be *field focused*.** Researchers go out into the schools, visit classrooms, and observe teachers, places where humans interact in educational events. The field focus, however, is not limited to places in which humans interact. It also includes the study of inanimate objects such as school architecture, textbooks, classroom arrangement, the design of playgrounds. In short, anything that is related to education is a potential subject matter of qualitative study.

2) **Qualitative studies reflect the *self as an instrument*.** The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It is the

ability to see and interpret significant aspects. It is this characteristic that provides unique, personal insight into the experience under study.

3) **Qualitative studies have an *interpretive character*.** For purposes here, the term interpretive has two meanings. First, it means that researchers try to *account for* what they have given an *account of*. Perhaps an attempt to ask, why does a teacher respond to the class in this way? What was the teacher's intent for the lesson? How has a new policy influenced the way teachers teach? This kind of interpretation, at times, requires the use of constructs from the social sciences. At other times, it requires the creation of new theory. A second meaning of *interpretation* pertains to what experience holds for those in the situation studied. It is a search for meaning within the educational events. In this sense qualitative researchers are interested in motive and in the quality of the experience under study. Qualitative researchers seek for "thick description," aiming beneath the surface behaviours to the meaning events have for those who experience them.

4) **Qualitative studies display the use of *expressive language* and the presence of "voice" in the text.** This means that the researcher is not detached from the interpretation and writing. The researcher, through expressive writing, displays a signature that makes it clear that a person, not a neutral machine, is behind the words. The presence of voice and the use of expressive language are important in furthering human understanding through empathy. Empathy is the ability to take the position of another human being with compassion. It is keeping the heart in situations we are trying to help readers understand.

5) **Qualitative studies include *attention to particulars*.** This attention to detail and context provides a sense of the uniqueness of the case under study. Conventional social science uses particulars to arrive at general statements, often through the use of sampling procedures, and inferential statistics. For statistical procedures to be used, data have to be created. The form data take to be statistically treated is numerical. When this transformation occurs the uniqueness of particular features is lost. What emerges is a description of relationships almost disconnected from the particulars from which data were originally secured. When this happens, the flavour of the particular situation, individual, event or object is lost. Qualitative studies seek to provide that flavour.

6) **Qualitative studies become believable because of the criteria for judging their success; that is, *coherence, insight, and instrumental utility*.** Unlike the experiment that demonstrates relations of cause and effect or correlations that statistically describe the strength of association, qualitative studies typically employ multiple forms of evidence, and they persuade by reason. The evidence employed in qualitative studies comes from multiple sources. We are persuaded by its "weight," by the coherence of the case, by the cogency of the interpretation. In qualitative research there is no statistical test of significance to determine if results "count"; in the end, what counts is a matter of judgement.

Part Two

Social perspectives

Chapter 2

On becoming a meditator: Reflections on adult learning and social context

John McIntyre

Is it possible to capture adult learning as phenomenon without reference to the social context in which that learning comes into being? This paper suggests that it is not, arguing that theories of adult learning which fail to link individual consciousness to social context will be poor theories.

With the exception of the work of Jarvis (1987) and Collins (1991), adult learning theory as represented by Knowles, Kolb, Mezirow, Brookfield, Boud and other writers has largely left the social context untheorised. It has been argued (McIntyre 1993) that 'adult learning theory' is an interpretive reaction to the abstracted empiricism of the North American participation tradition. But this movement replaced one form of individualistic psychology by another. Adult education missed the 'turn to sociology' taken by educational research in general (Young 1970, Connell *et al.* 1982, Apple 1982, Wexler 1989) and never mined the rich vein of interpretive sociology in order to provide an account of adult learning as a dialectical relationship of human consciousness and social setting. Because adult learning is always realised in context, the process needs to be understood as socially structured.

There are consequences for 'method' which follow from this theoretical neglect of context, and these are evident as currents running through the research reported in this colloquium. First, because adult learning theory is decontextualised, its applications paradoxically seek a *return to context* in order to rediscover the richness of adult experience to be found in situational meaning rather than abstracted theory. Second, there is a *resort to phenomenology*, because adult learning theory tends to reify the individual consciousness, perhaps most evident in Mezirow's use of the idea of perspective (Mezirow 1990), which elsewhere and especially in sociology has been a powerful metaphor for ideology (e.g. Mannheim 1936). In Husserlian terms, adult learning theory tends to psychologism and hence analysis has to find a way back to the richness of the adult learning 'in itself'.

Phenomenology answers this need (van Manen 1990) but not often in the form of *social* phenomenology, which can underwrite an account of learning as intersubjectively constructed meaning (see Heeren 1970). Third, there is a ***resort to naturalism*** exemplified in the stance of 'naturalistic inquiry' (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The methodology of adult learning theory is too often couched (if it is couched at all) in terms of an introspective method. This too easily falls into a naive empiricism which regards phenomena, including 'mental' phenomena, as unproblematic objects for inquiry, in the sense that the assumption of naturalism relieves the theorist of the burden of showing how their concepts and inquiry processes are structured by their social world and their participation in it. For adult learning theory to understand its own inquiry as socially situated and constructed, it would need to take account of its own way-making by being reflexive about theory production (Usher 1993). Finally, there is an ***indifference to politics***. It follows that accounts of adult learning which lack a social theory, are not easily able to link context to issues of knowledge and power, and comprehend the way social worlds perpetuate injustices by way of race, class and gender. Learning cannot be understood in political terms because it has not yet been understood in social terms. Thus, it is not surprising that, when context is discovered in adult education, it is often through analysis that understands learning as part of political struggle (Foley 1995).

This argument is best carried further by a process of examining an example of contextualised adult learning. This is to say, the 'what' of learning is just as important as the 'how' or process. This paper explores the practice of insight meditation. This example is all the more pertinent because meditation is often depicted in the West as an introspective technique that can be learned by individuals without reference to context, tradition and culture.

I first outline some detail about *vipassana* or insight meditation before describing how learning to be a meditator means acquiring a meditator's perspective, which is formed through situational learning in specific contexts, an example of which is the intensive meditation retreat. Thus, learning meditation is treated as a highly contextualised activity to be understood in its own terms rather than as learning processes abstracted from the social setting.

I attempt to theorise learning in context by calling on the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (Schutz 1967, Heeren 1970) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967, Button 1991), and to some extent the Chicago school of sociology including Becker's work on occupational identity (Becker 1995). I conclude by summarising some methodological implications of this approach.

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Meditation as adult learning

For various reasons, interest in meditation is becoming more common. Meditation is portrayed as a stress management technique and coping mechanism, a resort for the healing of life-threatening illness or a lifestyle choice associated with incense-burning, ambient music, crystals, massage and mysticism. It can be understood in quite contradictory ways - an activity as natural as breathing or as unnatural as arduous mental exercise, a state full of bliss or empty of meaning, a state of abandon and altered consciousness, or a form of mind control. Perhaps meditation attracts interest because it is culturally strange and offers some dimension palpably missing in our materially comfortable lives. Meditation promises to fill some ill-defined void.

Western culture is hazy and unclear about the practice and wraps it in mysticism, because the term refers to many different practices and their attendant philosophies and traditions. I will thus argue that, in order to describe the learning of meditation, it is necessary to have a clear account of meditation as a practice that is culturally situated.

How then does one learn to meditate, and what is it that one learns to do? Or, to ask the question in a different way, what does it mean for someone to become a meditator? From the point of view of adult learning, the latter is an interesting question, since the goal of meditation can be personal change of some kind.

I will try and understand the process of 'becoming a meditator' by using the concepts of identity, perspective, understandings, context and situation, drawing mainly on Schutz's ideas of how actors intersubjectively construct social situations, but also upon Chicago sociology, symbolic interactionism and other interpretive sociologies.[1] These concepts are briefly summarised -

- **Identity.** A person assumes the identity of a meditator and learns both to carry out activities (the practice) and learns the meaning of this practice. One can speak of someone as a meditator when they can enact the practice (how effectively is not in question here) and give evidence of some understanding of their activity. In this sense, a person 'becomes' a meditator when they understand themselves (and are seen by others) as meditators, just as golfers, gardeners, movie buffs or plumbers so understand themselves.

- **Perspective.** The meanings of the practice constitute a perspective that is developed by learning *about* and learning *through* the experience of the practice. To become a meditator therefore, one needs to develop such a perspective to know what one is doing and what others are doing in 'meditating'. This perspective can be more or less developed, according to knowledge and experience. Perspective is used in the sociological sense of an organisation of ideas, or specific ideology (Mannheim 1936).

- **Situational understandings.** Learning occurs through specific situations of practice and specific experiences. Experiences give rise to meanings and in turn situations are experienced in terms of these meanings.

- The process of learning is one of constructing and then deploying these understandings in specific situations. In turn, specific terminologies help practitioners to index these understandings and provide a basis for negotiating their participation in typical situations. The learning of meditation is mediated by the situation.

- **Context.** A range of such situations together make up a given social context of meditation practice, and there are several such contexts. 'Context' is understood as a set of specific situations.

- The meditator's perspective, conceptualised as an array of knowledge and understandings, is brought into play in situations that would be recognised by practitioners as typical of meditation practice. The paper refers throughout to one significant context for learning, the 'intensive *vipassana* retreat' which is contrasted with the everyday life world 'outside' the retreat. This context is a set of practices, including instruction, which are explicitly designed to promote the learning of meditation.

The meditation retreat as context for learning

I will refer to meditation as it is practised in Theravadan Buddhism[2] and I will mean a specific kind of practice. The paper refers to training in *vipassana* or insight meditation in the specific sense of 'mindfulness training' as it has been developed in the modern Burmese tradition.[3]

The 10-day intensive retreat is a common way for Westerners to learn insight meditation. A visiting teacher, possibly the head of a Burmese meditation centre, will lead the retreat in a suitable place. Participants make a donation to cover the costs of food and accommodation. On the first day, they assemble to receive instructions on the meditation practice and the daily routine and they undertake to keep the 'eight precepts' which provide a strict code for behaviour during the retreat.[4] This undertaking of the precepts helps to focus participants on their task by turning thought and action away from worldly everyday concerns, and is regarded as a stage of purification essential for progress to be made.

The aim of the intensive retreat is to develop 'mindfulness' in all activity, but notably in the three areas of sitting meditation, walking meditation and daily activities. The aim is to 'apply mindfulness' to all mental and bodily phenomena at every waking moment, in order to 'see things as they really are'. All meditation takes an object of concentration. In insight meditation, however, as opposed to the better known 'concentration meditation' (such as chanting a mantra), the object is not fixed but becomes whatever object arises in awareness.

In the modern Burmese tradition, the primary object of meditation in sitting is the rising and falling of the abdomen, the abdominal movement, rather than the traditional 'in-breath, out-breath' at the nostril.[5] But beginners learn that in insight meditation they must sharply observe *whatever* object comes onto the foreground of awareness. Such objects include: sensations of pain and pleasure; objects of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching; mental processes such as thinking or imagining; and so on. In the walking meditation, the primary object is the movement of the sole of the foot - the sensation of lifting, moving and dropping, observed as closely as possible. All movements in walking and other daily activities are greatly slowed in order to make this close observation possible, and it is said that meditators become like invalids, in their slowness and deliberateness of action. The teacher exhorts the meditators to slow down all activities and observe their details, for example, the multitude of sensations in taking and eating food.

'Mindfulness training' is well-illustrated by a brief extract from a famous set of instructions for taking up the practice in an intensive *vipassana* retreat:

> You must attend to the contemplation of every detail in the action of eating. When you look at the food [note] 'looking, seeing' - when you arrange the food, 'arranging' - when you bring the food to the mouth, 'bringing' - when you bend the neck, 'bending' - when the food touches the mouth, 'touching' - when placing the food in the mouth, 'placing' - when the mouth closes, 'closing' - when withdrawing the hand, 'withdrawing'. Should the hand touch the plate [note] 'touching' - when straightening the neck, 'straightening' - when in the act of chewing ' chewing' - when you are aware of the taste, 'tasting' - when swallowing the food' 'swallowing'. Should, while

> swallowing, the food be felt touching the sides of the gullet, 'touching'. Perform contemplation in this manner each time you partake of a morsel of food until you finish the meal. (Kornfield 1977:63).

To assist the meditator, he is instructed to note the intention to 'label' as he notes, to assist concentration on what is in effect a moving object. The teacher stresses continually that effort must be put into the noticing and 'noting' the phenomena. Though it is hard to do so at first, it is expected that conceptualising, analysing or reflecting are noticed and noted immediately as 'thinking' until they disappear.

There is a daily regime. Meditators rise at 3.30 in the morning, beginning with awareness of waking, and the movements of rising from the bed. Then there are periods of alternate walking and sitting, perhaps hourly, depending on the individual. A meal is taken at about 6.00 am and another about 11.00 am, with the rest of the day spent in walking and sitting. At evening, there is a talk by the teacher, with perhaps tea or other refreshment afterwards, with walking and sitting resuming until perhaps 9.00 pm or as late as the individual can manage into the small hours. Time is found during the day to perform activities such as bathing or washing clothes. Silence is observed wherever possible and reading and writing are discouraged as distractions from the practice.

As the retreat continues, meditators have interviews with the teacher, report matter-of-factly their experiences and receive guidance on problems with the practice. At first, it may be difficult to maintain concentration on the object (the abdominal movement or the moving foot or some daily activity). Various problems may arise in the first few days as the meditator settles into the routine - discomfort, pain in sitting or walking, inability to see the object, distracted thinking, emotional reactions such as frustration or disappointment, and so on. Later there may be some success in experiences - increased concentration, tranquillity and enjoyment in sitting, moments of insight, and so on.

The first retreat may be a difficult one since the would-be meditator may not have had much experience in meditation practice, though one has the advantage of coming with 'a beginner's mind' fresh to it. After the retreat, one may become interested in the philosophy of Buddhism, develop greater understanding of the practice and continue meditating, perhaps 'sitting' regularly with others. As understanding and interest develop, the 'yogi' may attend other retreats, experience such benefits of increased calm and less fearfulness in life and begin to integrate meditation practice into daily life.

Acquiring the meditator's perspective

The problem for beginning meditators is that they know little of the practice and its rationale except perhaps what has been read or heard from others, and this may not be accurate or true. Vague misunderstandings about meditation abound - that meditation is easy, natural, involves trances or emptying the mind or visualising pleasant scenes. They may know little of what to expect on a retreat and experience some events as culturally strange. The expectation that they should pay respects to the teacher in the traditional manner of the five-point prostration may come as a positive shock to Westerners who associate prostration with humiliation or idolatry. Little in the Westerners' experience or meagre knowledge of the mysterious East prepares them for such encounters with Buddhist tradition. Furthermore, it may be that the very intensiveness of the retreat will bring up all kinds of material (memories and feelings) from the past. A 50-year-old corporate manager may feel himself reporting to the teacher as a schoolboy to his headmaster, and indeed behave as if he were.

Yet, stripped of its mystical associations and culturally strange traditions, meditation is a supremely practical activity. If you ask the teacher what makes for progress, he may say simply it depends on right attitude and putting maximum effort into the practice. There is a sense in which meditation is like learning anything that requires practice. And perhaps the measure of how 'serious' one is about the practice leads to exactly the kind of question that might be asked about learning to play the violin or piano, or to play golf or tennis, or to paint or draw - whether one is 'serious enough' to practise for an hour or more every day.[6]

But this learning can only occur in a defined context, in specific situations designed to develop skilfulness and understanding and maintain motivation and effort. The retreat is designed as such context for learning. In phenomenological terms, people 'go on retreat' and leave the ordinary life-world. They enter into the training as to a different world, which is constituted differently from everyday life in order to facilitate progress toward the goal of 'breaking through' the appearances of 'ordinary' life experience and understanding through direct experience. As one experiences it, there is a boundary between the 'outside world' and the retreat-world. There is a process of transition in moving between these worlds.

The understandings and practices learned in the retreat can be carried back into everyday life and the meditator may strive to maintain their practice. It is said that one 'takes up' the practice wherever daily life permits it, particularly in daily sitting meditation but also at moments where mindfulness can be sustained (for example, in walking). Thus, what gives everyday life its 'everyday' quality is a question of some interest. In the perspective of the meditator, the 'ordinary' is ordinary *precisely because* mindful activity is sporadic rather than continuous. The meditator has learned that the myriad purposive activities of everyday life performed at their 'normal' speed have qualities that can now not be seen. The veil of ignorance has been again drawn across one's understanding.

Thus, in ordinary life after the retreat, effort is directed to a period of daily meditation where effort can be applied to developing concentration and recovering mindfulness. In a sense, the meditator retreats from the everyday life into the practice.

But how are the understandings that make the 'perspective of the meditator' learned through experience of the retreat in the first place?

First, there are innumerable things to be learned about how to walk, how to sit and what being mindful of daily activities in their detail means. The meditator learns to recognise what it is they must recognise. There are strategies and practicalities here. The meditator soon learns to minimise the actions required in any activity, so that the object of attention at any one time is less complex and can be observed with less distraction.

For this reason, routine and order become exceptionally important. It is helpful to eliminate unnecessary complexity from every activity. So, for example, in removing one's shoes at the entry to the meditation hall, the minimum actions are determined, in a sense rehearsed and then observed at each occasion. Eastern slip-on footwear is well adapted to this minimisation. The meditator may even arrange slippers so that they are facing the way to be gone, rather than have to turn about to resume walking.

The meditator arranges routines so that 'worry and flurry' over the performance of daily minutiae does not upset the continuous application of mindfulness to these activities as *objects of awareness*. The meditator may work out a sequence of actions in eating in order to observe them mindfully. However, it is also part of the learning that this is a danger to mindful effort, since the meditator, tiring of effort of observation, can slip into unaware performance of the actions or mere observation of the routine. The teacher will therefore continually urge meditators to sharply and energetically observe 'the actions themselves' 'as they really are' and to put in effort that is 'continuous', 'sustained' and 'unremitting'. The meditator will also develop, through experience, strategies for dealing with difficult conditions that disturb the practice, such as heat and humidity or constant noise that can lead to drowsiness and loss of effort.

All of this learning is about what insight meditators *do*. The meditator must then deal with more difficult kinds of learning. No one will tell them how to walk, what is slow enough, or whether it is correct, or how to relax the body if it is tense. The meditator has to discover from experience what works. The meditator soon discovers that others walk differently, perhaps giving clues to sharpen observation. But such observation can be a distraction from the effort of being mindful of one's own activity and weakens mindfulness unless the meditator catches the intention to look and the looking act. There may be feelings of self-consciousness, inadequacy, frustration or boredom, resentment or anger, to be overcome. There may be fearfulness about failing to learn, ill will towards others or feelings of competition with others, loneliness, depression or misery. There may be disturbing doubts about the entire project of the retreat and the practice itself, with which meditators must struggle and struggle with whatever resources they possess, to overcome such difficulties, if meditation practice is to develop.

Learning how to deal with these negative feelings and doubts about the practice is an integral part of the learning. Meditators have to learn to deal successfully on their own behalf with whatever the practice throws up, encouraged in general by the teacher who will emphasise that meditation takes courage and resolution, patience and perseverance. There may be deep problems arising from past experience which, in the very nature of introspective practice, cannot be escaped and must at last be faced. Should these difficulties be confessed to the teacher, the meditator may be advised to note them 'just as feelings' energetically as objects until he can resume the primary object or, if severe, to practise in a specific way to overcome the obstacle. The meditator may later gain deeper understanding of such obstacles as 'the five hindrances' to progress. From the experience, one learns what is required by the meditation practice and begins to understand its deeper meaning and significance.

If it were all difficulty, no meditator would persevere. As the retreat progresses the difficulties may decrease and the meditator may achieve a level of mindfulness and some insight into mental and physical processes. Here the meditator finds another challenge and potential difficulty. It may be that, after some early success, effort to be mindful of every detail slackens. Strong reactions of pleasure and satisfaction in achieving some success, a 'high' equal to the 'lows' found earlier, may be experienced. Meditators may feel they have learned enough for now and ease up on effortful practice. Thus, the experienced meditator learns to treat such phenomena as fatigue, complacency, self-satisfaction as a signal to arouse greater effort and as objects for attention.

In other ways, the retreat experience will sustain the resolution of the meditator - experiences of lightness of being, of ease of concentration and sustained mindfulness together with a sense of knowing how to do it, and may as a result become more energised and more resolute. He or she comes to understand the retreat as a process of training to be undergone, with its characteristic phases and reactions.

Thus the perspective of the meditator takes in understandings about the training itself as a process *one subjects oneself to.* There will be some understanding of mental and bodily changes that accompany the retreat experience, seen as a process undergone. The meditator will have learned how to make these phenomena objects for inquiry.

Reflections on the learning

This brief account of the learning of the meditator in the context of the intensive retreat (inevitably coloured by the writer's experiences) may help to suggest something of the complexity of the 'perspective' that structures the meditator's understanding and practice. The perspective will comprise various kinds of knowledge, including strategies for handling the demands and difficulties of so intensive a training experience. In an important sense, these strategies embody what is learned about 'training oneself' along the lines of a time-honoured and ancient practice.

At another level, these practical understandings involve degrees of knowledge generated by the practice. The first superficial understandings about meditation are deepened through 'direct experience' of one's own processes and increasing knowledge of Buddhist teachings (and the concept of 'direct experience' is obviously a central understanding). This may be received or theoretical knowledge, as is taught by the teacher, but the appeal is always to test this teaching and realise it as knowledge through meditative experience.

Using Schutz's phenomenology, it is possible to sketch in a preliminary way how a meditator's understandings develop from the typical situations that make up the retreat context. Schutz suggested that the social actors intersubjectively construct the situations in which they participate. He outlined how social action could be understood as a process by which persons 'construct' the social setting through processes of reciprocal typification of situations, courses of action, persons and their motives. The process is one where the social action is possible, not only because of one's own understanding, but because there is a 'reciprocity of perspectives' regarding one's own and others' understanding of the situation (Schutz 1967; Garfinkel 1967).

Schutz's notion of a 'scheme of interpretation' is a useful way of operationalising the idea of situational learning. The participant is seen as having a 'stock of knowledge' that comes to be organised in its relevance to the participants and their understanding of the situation as it begins to be enacted. Elements of the 'objective situation' (such as the physical character of the meditation hall) also enter into the picture, as the actor constructs a 'scheme of interpretation' that typifies situation, course of action, personal type and so on. Thus, 'I am now walking in line to the dining hall for the midday meal' comprehends a typical situation which brings into play many specific shared meanings. This process is intersubjective and actors take for granted each other's assumptions about the meaning of the situation, including the assumption of a 'reciprocity of perspectives'. Typification may shift as participants adjust their understandings of the subjective meanings of their interaction. In the attitude of everyday life, many of these understandings are taken for granted, in Garfinkel's phrase, as the 'routine grounds of everyday life'(Garfinkel 1967).

At this point there is a convergence between Schutz's social phenomenology and Buddhist phenomenology. In the world of the retreat, situations are deliberately constituted so as to suspend the 'attitude of everyday life', including the taken-for-granted assumption that things are as they appear to be (and as we constitute them by typifying situations, actors, motives and so on). But the mindfulness training seeks to pierce through the typifying activity of the 'everyday mind' in order to disclose mental and physical phenomena 'as they really are'. In retreat, persons are 'normal' if they are preoccupied, intent and contemplative. Participants may ignore interaction with each other, because they take the perspective of the meditator and attribute to each other this perspective and its schemes of interpretation. The test of the validity of that perspective is meditative experiences that are 'beyond the ordinary' and which sharply present themselves as 'direct experience' and which are not, in the immediate moment, constructed by the process of typification. Thus, for beginning meditators, there is a shifting between modes of ordinary 'typifying consciousness' and mindful, concentrated attention that suspends such thinking activity.

Thus the important moments of learning for the meditator occur where the activity of the ordinary mind, i.e. the conceptualising, typifying mind, is replaced by powerful 'noting' or apprehending consciousness leading to insight into the constitutive elements of bodily and mental phenomena. This order of learning may enrich the meditator's perspective with new understandings and, moreover, impel the meditator to identify with the perspective as a frame of reference for experience beyond the world of the retreat.

Conclusion

It would be possible to re-interpret the above account of meditators' learning in terms of adult learning theory and, to make the point, in terms of one well-known model (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985) that there is not one but several modes of 'reflection' on experience to be found in the meditator's activity, and further, that there is a contrast between reflective thought and 'direct attention to phenomena' of the kind produced by the mindfulness training described in this paper.

Again, it could be shown that the kind of learning arising from the training that is most prized by meditators is akin to 'not-thinking' and is opposed to critical and rationalistic use of mind altogether. This is not to invalidate the use of 'reflection on experience', but to point out that such theories of adult learning are themselves cultural products whose meanings are tied to contexts of practice, with characteristic assumptions organised in professional perspectives or discourses. A reflexive adult learning theory would, therefore, begin to make interesting linkages to context and situation and begin to develop an account of how our familiar concepts of adult learning reflect the particular social and cultural contexts in which they are produced.

Finally, recognising that the point of the colloquium is to highlight qualitative methodology, there are some methodological implications of this paper. Summarising the approach, there are some four steps to analysing adult learning in context:

- Characterise learners in terms of their identity and perspective. Recognise that adult learners are social actors who take identities within particular contexts. Postulate a 'perspective' which organises knowledge and understanding about the context and how to act in the context. Describe the context as a background to the task of analysing the 'content' of learning.

- Describe the context referring to a range of specific situations. Examine these situations, describing situational meanings that are 'taken up' in the learner's perspective. Describe examples of these situational learnings in detail. The learner's perspective is then able to be described in terms of the 'content' of situational learning.

- Learning as typification. Focus on the way in which learners construct their understanding in terms of the typifying activity in the situation. Examine how situational meaning is created and re-created as actors negotiate participation. Look for typical expressions that index understandings and practices.

- Perspective and context. Link the perspective and the situations which give rise to, and bring into play, the 'perspective' of the learner. It is then possible to complete an account of the way perspective is tied into specific situations through specific understandings that are crucial to social action in those contexts.

This approach has a number of implications for re-theorising the 'perspective of the learner' as it has been employed, for example, in the idea of 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow 1990). Adult learning is, then, always a function of change in a perspective that is *tied to the contexts which give rise to situational meanings*. Adult learning is *situational learning* produced through a dialectic of knowing and acting in a given social context.

Notes

1. It is the process of learning meditation practice that is theorised in terms of social phenomenology, not the practice itself, since for the meditator convinced by experience of the wisdom of Buddhist teachings this is all that is required to 'explain' the practice and its meaning. In writing this paper I am conscious of the debt to my meditation teacher, Sayadaw U Janaka Bhivamsa, Chan Myay Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma. I would like to acknowledge the encouragement of my friends Ven. Pannyavaro, Malcolm McClintock and Chris McLaughlin of the Blue Mountains Insight Mediation Centre.

2. The fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy are now accessible to Westerners. Among the best known books dealing with Theravadan Buddhism are *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (Nyanaponika Thera 1962), and *Buddhism Explained* by Phra Khantipalo (1989). About the best work on specific meditation traditions is Kornfield's *Living Buddhist Masters* (Kornfield 1977). Nyanaponika's book is recommended.

3. Westerners have been drawn to Burma, where a vigorous tradition of intensive *vipassana* practice has developed this century. Burmese and other teachers have visited many countries to give retreats where insight meditation centres have subsequently been established.

4. The Eight Precepts (*attanga sila*) are: to refrain from taking life; to refrain from any sexual activity; to refrain from taking what is not given; to refrain from false speech; to refrain from using intoxicants that cause heedlessness; to refrain from eating after noon; to refrain from singing and dancing and watching entertainments and to refrain from using cosmetics, perfumes and ornaments and making oneself attractive to others; to refrain from using a soft and luxurious bed.

5. Detailed descriptions of the Burmese practice can be found in Nyanaponika (1962, Chapter 5) and the chapter on Mahasi Sayadaw in Kornfield (1977).

6. There is an interesting issue regarding the 'taking of an identity' as a meditator, concerning how serious an activity the meditation is, in view of post-modernist positions on the futility of the enlightenment project, to be understood of course, in Eurocentric terms.

   There is only so much room for self-deluding activity, or a going-through of the motions, without some self-questioning of motives. Perhaps one is drawn to 'be a meditator' in order to seem to have a rich and strange identity. Perhaps to give another dimension to life, to make a different life because one existing life is unsatisfactory. Perhaps the cultural strangeness of the habit confers an aura of 'difference'. But if that were all there were to meditation, a mere signifier of lifestyle difference, it is doubtful that one would persist beyond the first enthusiasm.

   By definition, the practice cannot be sustained if there is no truth to oneself about what is experienced in the activity.

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Chapter 3

Bread and sex: Learning in Brazilian women's organisations

Griff Foley

The priest told us that women in the ***favela*** *don't need sex, they need bread ... I told him that women do need and want sex ... and that if their husbands beat or mistreat them, they need alternatives.*

- President of a Sao Paulo women's group,
1983 (in Alvarez 1990, p.130)

Introduction

The main issue discussed in this paper relates to how we theorise the relationship of adult learning and education, on the one hand, and social movement activity, on the other. I have written a number of papers on this theme (Foley, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1994), and am currently writing a book on it. As I do this, I find that my earlier papers, while they provide some insights into the relationship of learning and social movement activity, also to some extent mask the complexities and contradictions of the relationship. The 'snapshots' of learning in social action contained in these papers need to be augmented by studies which more richly contextualise the evolution and dynamics of social movement activity. This paper is one such attempt. Its focus is learning and education in women's movements in Brazil during the transition from military dictatorship to formal democracy in the 1970s and 1980s.

The second issue relates to how we **write** adult education research and theory. One of my favourite pieces of adult education writing, David Head's *Education at the Bottom*, begins, 'Education is invasion.' Immediately you know where you are, and you think, 'This bloke is not mucking around; he is not some detached academic wanker; he cares about these learners and he is really trying to evaluate the effects of his work.' And Head sustains this feeling throughout a long paper, a *tour de force* of detailed description and rigorous and courageous analysis, a soul-searching that is in no way self-indulgent but which, with great sensitivity and realism, affirms the value of difficult educational work.

Head was writing immediately from his experience. The paper you are about to read is a different form of writing. In it, I am not only reporting on social processes and a social context of which I have no immediate experience, I have also tried to write the learning dimension of social movement activity into the account. The writers I draw upon have no overt interest in learning - the learning and educational dimensions therefore have to be 'written in'. So I would appreciate it if the reader could keep the following questions in mind: How convincing is this 'writing in'? And: What could be done to make it more convincing?

Analytical framework

In her study of Brazilian women's organisations in the period 1968-1988, Sonia Alvarez (1990) argues that we need to examine the macro-economic, the micro-political and the discursive dimension of social movement activity (see especially pp.57-59, 38-55, 260-269). Alvarez's particular interest is in the gender dimension of these movements and struggles in non-revolutionary situations (pp.3-4, 13, 264). Our broad interest is in the learning dimension of emancipatory social struggles. Our particular interest is in educational interventions in these struggles. So we have five variables (see Figure 1).

Some key questions to ask in relation to particular sites and struggles:

- What forms and expressions do social movement activity take?
- What are the crucial features of the political economic context? How do these shape social movement activity?
- What are the micro-politics of the situation?
- What are the discursive practices and struggles of social movement actors and their opponents? *To what extent do these practices and struggles facilitate or hinder emancipatory learning and action?*
- What does all this mean for education? What interventions are possible and helpful?

The issues raised by these questions will be explored through a re-reading of Alvarez's data on Brazilian women's organisations. An attempt will be made to read the learning dimension into these data.

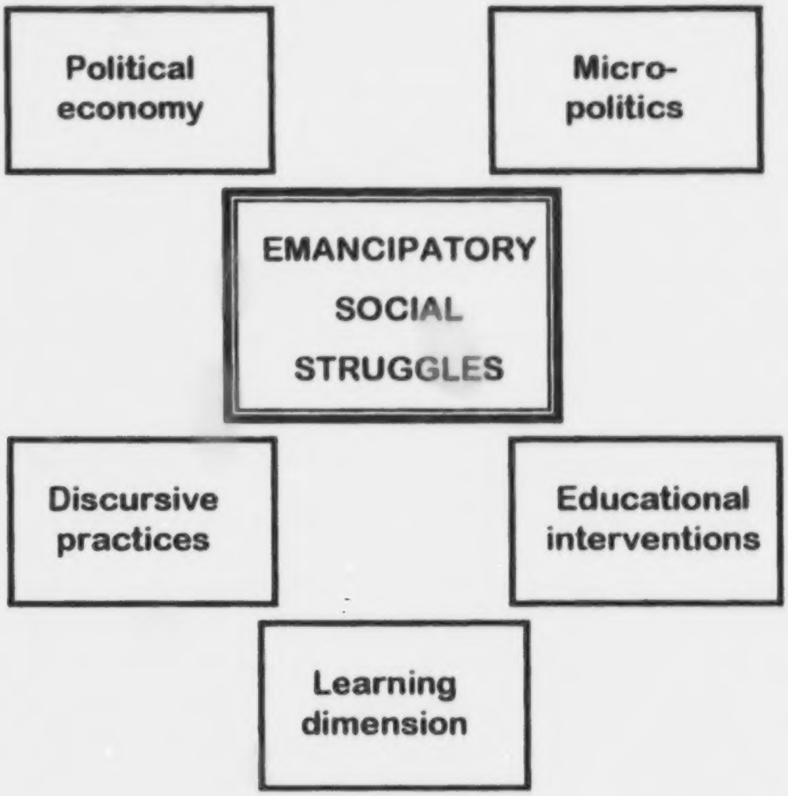
Political economy
Micro-politics
EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL STRUGGLES
Discursive practices
Educational interventions
Learning dimension

Figure 1

Brazilian women's organisations in the transition to democracy

On April 1, 1964, a military junta deposed the populist government of Jao Goulart in Brazil. Conservative upper and middle-class women's organisations played an important role in preparing the ideological ground for the coup with a series of orchestrated demonstrations. 'Armed with crucifixes and rosaries, thousands of upper and middle-class women paraded through the streets of Brazil's major cities, imploring the military to perform its 'manly duty' and restore order and stability to the nation.' The last of these marches occurred the day before the coup. (Alvarez 1990, pp.5-6)

In power, the junta sent the women 'back to the kitchens' but continued to use 'traditional symbols of feminine piety and spiritual superiority, morality and motherhood' to justify its repressive political and economic project. This contemptuous and manipulative attitude to women on the part of the military in Brazil and other Latin American countries during this period has been characterised by South American feminist scholars as the 'highest expression' of patriarchal oppression, part of an ensemble of authoritarianisms. As the Chilean feminist theorist Julietta Kirkwood has noted:

> ... authoritarianism is more than an economic problem and something more than a political problem, ... it has its roots and causes in all the social structures, and ... one must question and reject many elements and contents not previously considered 'political' because they were attributed to day to day private life. Today people have begun saying that the family and the socialisation of children are authoritarian, as well as rigid in the assignment of sex roles, that education, the factories, intermediary associations, political parties, are constituted in an authoritarian fashion. (In Alvarez 1990, p.7)

The junta's political strategy generated resistance from organised sections of civil society. In 1967 and 1968, workers, students and women held massive demonstrations against the regime. These protests generated further repression, including political assassinations and torture. But this terror failed to crush the resistance (p.37).

Over the next several years people's organisations expanded their activities, forcing the military regime to initiate a process of political liberalisation from above *(abertura* in Portuguese), leading to a long period of transition culminating in the restoration of formal democracy in 1985 (p.11).

The seeds of popular resistance lay in the junta's economic strategy, which

> ... rested on an accelerated industrialisation drive fuelled by multinational and transnationalised domestic capital investment and debt-financed state investment, supported by regressive wage policies and tight controls on labour. ... [A] policy of deliberate income concentration [in favour of the upper and middle classes], aimed at expanding the domestic market for durable consumer goods, coupled with the systematic political exclusion and repression of those most adversely affected by these policies. (pp.37, 51)

The military junta's fixation on economic growth led to a rapid increase in production, with gross national product increasing by an annual average of seven per cent through the 1970s. This growth was achieved through the gross exploitation of labour. The usurpation of peasant lands to facilitate the development of capital-intensive agriculture, together with the expansion of manufacturing industry, led to massive rural-urban migration, with the urban population growing at an annual rate of 4.5 per cent during the 1970s. Most labour migrants settled on the outskirts of cities (*peripheria* in Portuguese), often on land 'sold' illegally by speculators and lacking roads, water, electricity, sewerage, health and educational facilities. At the same time, the exceedingly low wages of workers pushed an increasing number of families into poverty. The real value of the minimum wage fell 20 per cent in the 1960s. By 1974 30 per cent of Brazilian workers lived in absolute poverty; in the same year a worker needed to labour for 137 hours to secure a meagre government-defined minimum food basket (pp.44-45).

The rapid decline in the living capacity of working people forced many women to seek waged work or to engage in the domestic production of goods or services. Responsibility for trying to do something about the lack of urban services in the *peripheria* also fell primarily on women, both because women were traditionally cast in the role of family caregiver and sustainer and because men's waged work, and travel to and from their jobs, took them away from their homes for most of their waking lives (pp.46-47).

The *peripheria* thus constituted reserves of labour, in the southern African sense. With families unable to survive solely on male wages, women were forced into the workforce and/or into some form of domestic production for subsistence and/or the market. The very capacity of families to survive in these creative ways enabled capital to continue to pay below-subsistence wages.

But the conditions of life in the *peripheria* also generated extensive local political action by women. From the mid-1960s onwards, hundreds of women's organisations were formed in the urban settlements of Brazil, involving hundreds of thousands of Brazilian working-class women in self-help and protest activities.

During the same period many middle-class women also became involved in community organisations and other feminist initiatives. It is to an examination of the micro-politics, discursive practices and learning dimension of these women's movements that we now turn.

Micro-politics, discursive practices and adult learning

Alvarez's study seeks to explain the emergence and development of progressive women's organisations and movements in the period of repression, economic crisis and transition to democracy in Brazil in the period 1964-1989. The particular focus of the study is 'the relationship between non-revolutionary political change and changes in women's consciousness and mobilization' (p.3).

> Many analysts of social movements note that while broad socio-economic change may alter the objective conditions that can generate protest, these changes do not necessarily affect people's subjective perception of those conditions. (Alvarez 1990, p.57, drawing on McAdam 1982, p.34)

In Brazil:

> ... both the subjective perception of and the objective possibilities for gender-based protest were drastically altered during the 1970s as political liberalisation proceeded and women joined opposition movements and militant organisations. (ibid., p.57)

During this period:

> opposition discourses concerning human rights, social justice, equality and liberation, coupled with the rise of feminist discourses on an international plane, implanted ideological seeds that would later be cultivated by Brazilian women to disseminate discourses about women's rights, gendered justice, equality between women and men, and ultimately, women's liberation. (ibid., pp.57-8)

This ideological development was supported by a number of other factors, namely, male domination in both church-based and secular left organisations, which heightened women's awareness of gendered inequality, the organisational resources provided by the new groups, and political liberalisation after 1974 which created a climate which legitimated debate and action on women's issues and which forced all political parties to lend at least rhetorical support to women's issues (*ibid.*, p.58).

The new discourses played 'a crucial role in shaping the subjective possibilities' for political action 'by interpellating oppressive conditions for subordinate social groups and classes, fashioning new social and political identities, and providing ... ethical rationales for engaging in anti-status quo behaviour and political action'(p.58). Alvarez argues that two factors were particularly important to women's mobilisation in Brazil - ideological changes in the Catholic Church and the re-emergence of the militant Left.

The church, the Left and women's organisations

Until the 1960s the Brazilian church had been a pillar of reaction. It had fiercely opposed Goulart's mild liberal reforms and had actively supported the 'family, God and liberty' campaign that helped bring the military junta to power. But the liberation theology that emerged from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Medellin conference of Latin American Bishops in 1968 triggered a struggle between conservative and radical ideologies in the Brazilian church (*ibid.*, pp.60-61).

Vatican II redefined the church's mission in the world, enabling the secular to be placed alongside the religious, and the political alongside the spiritual. The church was urged to exercise moral leadership in civil society, to act as a catalyst and prophet to promote justice. The Medellin conference articulated the idea of the Church of the Poor, a church that would stand with the poor and oppressed. During the 1970s, in the face of massive human rights abuses throughout South and Central America (see Galeano 1989, 1992), including against many church members, the church sharpened its critique of institutionalised violence and authoritarianism. By the mid-1970s the Brazilian Bishops' Conference 'had become a major opposition force, shielding the politically persecuted and fostering community organisations and mobilisation among the poor' (*ibid.*, pp.61-62).

A particularly important element of progressive shift in the Brazilian church was the creation of Christian Base Communities (*Commuidades Eclesias de Base* or CEBs). These groups of 15 to 40 parishioners met together regularly to discuss the new social teachings of the church. By the late 1980s there were over 100,000 of these groups in Brazil. The social gospel of the progressive church also brought many nuns and priests into direct contact with the concrete conditions of working people's lives. These experiences radicalised clergy and led to the articulation of a liberation theology, which combined Christian teaching and critical sociological analysis which drew on such sources as dependency theory and Marxism. The radical pastoral work of the Brazilian church also drew on the work of Paulo Freire who, during his work with slum dwellers and peasants in and around Recife in the 1960s, developed an educational methodology which helped the oppressed to identify and work out ways of dealing with the sources of their oppression (*ibid.* pp.62, 70).

The reformed church also advocated an increased public role for women. 'Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity', Pope John XXIII wrote in his 1966 encyclical letter 'Peace on Earth', 'they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments.' In Brazil women constituted the majority of members of church organisations. Yet there was a deep-seated essentialist view of women in the church, even in its more radical sections. Women were seen as wives, mothers, nurturers, succourers. Theoretical and rhetorical affirmations of women's equality with men were not matched by changes in behaviour. A study of women's clubs in Sao Paulo concluded that women in the church were called upon to perform tasks rather than make decisions, and that those tasks were often 'mere extensions' of the work women did in their homes. Women performed most of the 'infrastructural work' for church and other community groups: catering, cleaning, sweeping. Alvarez concluded from her own extensive observations of Sao Paulo mothers' clubs that they functioned primarily as 'ladies auxiliaries' to parish organisations: 'I did not see or hear of a single club that was created with the intention of helping women gain consciousness, or act politically, as women', (*ibid.* pp.68-69).

There were similar problems with women's position in the Brazilian Left. The defeat of armed struggle in the 1960s and again in the early 1970s caused many on the Left to discard the 'vanguardist' notion that had informed the guerilla groups and to join in the painstaking and long-term political work (frequently referred to as 'ants' labour' *[trabalho de formiginha]* by Alvarez's informants) of community-based organisations. Many Left women began working as *assessoras* (consultants) in church-linked mothers' clubs and youth groups. These women took with them into these organisations the critique of patriarchal behaviour they had developed in Left organisations, where they had experienced a similar marginalisation to that of women in church-based organisations (*ibid.*, pp.70-75).

An understanding of the progressive and patriarchal ideologies underpinning Brazilian community-based women's organisations is important, because the ambiguities and contradictions in these ideologies helped to shape their members' political learning. As we will see below, women in these organisations increasingly came to critique patriarchal ideas and practices and to assert their own distinctive gender interests and perspectives.

Social action and learning in women's organisations

From the early 1960s Brazilian women began to organise around a range of issues: low wages for domestic servants, lack of services in the *peripheria*, rapidly rising cost of living, human rights abuses. From the mid-1970s these organisations began to work together in city-wide, regional and national campaigns. During 1973 mothers' clubs in a Sao Paulo parish conducted a survey of consumer prices among local women. The results of the survey were published as an open letter to government authorities. The letter denounced the miserable conditions of life in the *peripheria* and demanded price freezes on staples, salary increases corresponding to rises in the cost of living, an immediate salary bonus of 25 per cent, and the establishment of municipal food distribution centres, facilities for consumer cooperatives and day-care centres for the children of working women. The survey/open letter tactic proved attractive to other women's groups. Further, expanded surveys were conducted in 1975 and 1976 (*ibid.*, pp.84-85).

Day-care for children was an important focus of women's political activity in the 1970s. Both working-class and middle-class women, entering the waged labour force in large numbers, demanded publicly-provided day-care, often using the same survey/public letter tactic employed in the cost-of-living movement. But the demand for day care, and the very establishment of women's organisations, could emerge in indirect ways. In the Sao Paulo neighbourhood of Jadim Miriam a mothers' club was established in the late 1960s

> ... at the initiative of Johnson and Johnson, whose sales representatives came to the neighbourhood to promote sanitary napkins, teach women to use them, etc. The sales representatives also promoted lectures on women's reproductive cycle, menstruation and so on. After the Johnson and Johnson people left, we began holding sewing lessons for local women at the church which we combined with lectures on different subjects of interest to women. (From an interview with two founding members of the organisation. Cited in Alvarez 1990, p.85)

Alvarez found that 'participation in the club itself led women to formulate new, gender-related political demands. At meetings, women typically discussed problems encountered in their daily lives, in their marriages, in feeding and caring for their families. Neighbourhood women began to value the ability to come together to discuss the shared problems and devise collective solutions' (p.86). Again the founding members take up the story:

> The mothers' club had existed for a long time before the creche movement began. The women always brought their children to the club meetings and at first we rotated taking care of them among ourselves. Around 1970 or so, we began to think of a place where we could leave our children to be taken care of when we had other things to do... Discussions continued and the idea emerged to organise a group of women who would go talk to the prefecture... We didn't even know what we would say there, but we went anyway, six of us, and we told them of the need for day-care in our neighbourhood. Two social workers appeared and suggested we circulate a petition in the neighbourhood. So we did. (Alvarez 1990, p.86)

Their encounter with the social workers contained further learning for the Jardim Miriam women, this time about the state. When the women returned with their completed petition, the workers referred them to the 'official' neighbourhood organisation (the SAB), established under the Goulart regime in the 1950s. The demand for day-care sat with this organisation for 'five whole years'. And meanwhile, the women reported, 'We were all waiting for the prefecture to come and build a day-care centre because we had asked for one.' Eventually the women realised that they 'had been lied to' by the workers. This realisation had come about because 'other things were happening in the neighbourhood by then that helped us to gain political consciousness'.

In the mid-1970s the new social emphasis in the local Catholic church had led to the establishment of a new community-based organisation in Jardim Miriam. Many of the members of the mothers' club also joined the new organisation and in it they became involved in a range of campaigns - for elementary schools, health care facilities and day-care. In these campaigns the women encountered militant opposition groups and Christian charity groups. From these activists the women learned how to deal with government agencies: 'If we're there pressing them, things will happen. If we leave it up to them, we'll never get anything we need in the neighbourhood.' The women then decided to bypass the SAB and began to organise weekly trips to the municipal bureau of social welfare (SEBES).

In the late 1970s the Struggle for Day Care Group recruited more members from a local sewing class, which had been established by a radical priest. The Struggle group also developed strong contacts with the more radical social workers at SEBES who kept the members informed of the progress of their demand for a day-care centre. 'We would go there, fifteen or twenty or more of us, whenever we thought things were being held up ... as mothers we demanded the right to a place to leave our children.' Women who were organising for day-care in another villa began to come to the Jardim Miriam group, to learn from their experiences.

According to Alvarez, there were a number of distinctive features of the Jardim Miriam experience which it shared with other women's groups in the *peripheria*. The first is that while there was important learning for the women in the day care campaign it was of a 'personally transformative' kind. 'For many women', Alvarez argues, 'participation in community organisations is a pleasant experience, an empowering experience, one that breaks the monotony of their daily housework routines and enables them to "learn about the world" from other women.'

This contact enables women to identify 'shared concerns, common needs'. But those needs 'were not defined in terms of the larger political-economic system nor on the basis of an articulate theoretical, or ideological understanding of that system'. Rather, these women 'developed political claims *on the basis of their day-to-day lived experience as women* ... They began to organise for urban improvements that would facilitate their jobs as wives and mothers.' (*ibid.*, p.88. Emphasis added)

A second feature of the Jardim Miriam campaigns was the important role played by outside activists in facilitating local political organising. 'Popular movement participants from adjoining neighbourhoods, charity workers, political activists and state social workers all furnished key organisational resources and information to local women's self-help efforts in the urban periphery', (*ibid.*, p.88). But many government-sponsored organisations which could have supported community groups like the Jardim Miriam Struggle group did not. This apathy or refusal had the paradoxical effect of helping women to become more self-reliant and activist. They learned that, if they did not do the organising, it would not get done (*ibid.*).

At the same time that women in the Sao Paulo *peripheria* were becoming politically engaged, feminism was re-emerging among middle-class women in the city. In the late 1960s, women in student and other Left organisations began to meet in small groups, usually to discuss Marxist-feminist texts. For some years discussion in these groups centred on the relationship of feminism and socialism and the dominant view was that women had no interests apart from the general popular interest in overthrowing the military regime. But, by the mid-1970s, both middle-class and working-class women were beginning to share their experiences 'as wives, mothers, lovers, *as women*' (*ibid.*, p.100). Working-class women in community organisations

> ... often discussed problems they shared... about their marriages, their sexual lives, their desire to control fertility, their thirst for more information about the world outside the domestic sphere to which they were usually confined, their relationship to family and community—subjects that middle-class feminists themselves initially thought would be taboo among women of the popular classes. (ibid., pp.100-101)

Socialist feminists also began to distinguish between class and gender oppression. A feminist activist recalled that her group's work in distributing the feminist newspaper *Nos Mulheres* ('Us Women') 'was also a moment for consciousness raising with the women's groups with which we had contact, the result was that, little by little, we confirmed, in practice, the universality of certain sensations: the uneasiness or unrest of 'being female'; the feeling of suffering some injustice without necessarily exactly understanding its proportions' (*ibid.*, pp.101-102). By 1977 an editorial in that same newspaper was asserting that the feminist struggle 'went beyond' the class struggle and that 'woman also suffers a specific oppression because of the simple fact of being a woman' - and then went on to spell out in some detail what that oppression entailed (p.102).

During these years working-class and middle-class women were also coming together in neighbourhood organisations and in the increasing number of umbrella organisations that grew up around the day-care and cost-of-living campaigns. In these years, too, the first city-wide and national women's congresses were held, and International Women's Day began to be celebrated (*ibid.*, pp.89-108). In these years a clear distinction emerged between two tendencies in the women's movement: the feminist and the feminine. This distinction was spelt out in a newspaper account of the second Sao Paulo women's congress in 1980:

> If feminist, the major preoccupation is the discussion of women's specific problems, regardless of her class or area of political action. In this case, general struggles are important and should be stimulated as areas of action for women, but only if their militancy does not make them forget their condition as women, who are consequently doubly oppressed: as women and as a class. If feminine, its central preoccupation is to discuss the general struggles (for water, sewage, electricity, day care, etc.) and the participation of women in these struggles. The specificity of women's struggles is not important before the struggle of all of society. (Alvarez 1990, pp.124-125)

At the second congress the differences between these two positions were so sharp that at one point their adherents came to blows (p.123). Nevertheless, the congress was able to articulate some goals acceptable to both sides: contraception information to be available in health clinics; universal state provision of non-coercive, accessible family planning; the creation of a forum to debate the abortion issue; the continuation of the struggle for day-care and occupational training for women (p.124).

As the 1980s progressed there was an increasing shift in women's organisations generally from seeing women's struggles simply as part of a broad movement against dictatorship and for democracy, to seeing that there are specific women's issues that had to be dealt with: issues around sexuality, reproductive rights, violence against women, divorce, child care, the domestic division of labour (pp.111-112).

Out of these differences and struggles among women came important learning. The congresses and other coordinated initiatives provided spaces in which women from different backgrounds could learn from each other and come to understand that they needed each other. The alternative newspaper *Em Tempo*, commenting on the first Sao Paulo women's congress, referred to that forum's ‘capacity to create a climate of enthusiasm, solidarity and trust, and to also touch the emotions of participants’ and how this had ‘led to spontaneous demands that ‘we cannot say goodbye now ... we cannot wait until the next Congress; we must continue to struggle together’’. (p.115). Cross-class organisational work and forums also provided opportunities for women to learn by speaking, to articulate their developing consciousness of previously repressed or silent areas of their lives. So, for example, a working-class woman's account of the exploitation of her sexuality, spoken at the second congress, was reproduced in *Em Tempo*:

> Women suffer much more with problems of sex. I married when I was fourteen years old. My father said that I was three years older on the documents. I have been living with my husband for thirty years. Sometimes I rebel and wonder why I ever got married. When the girls were born, I slept with them, after working like a dog all day long. He never helped me, slept in the other room. Then, when the girls were still, he would come and get me. He would fulfil himself and that was it. Me, never. I know I always repressed that side, sex. But because of my daughters I put up with everything. I live for them. (ibid., p.114)

But one of the great strengths of Alvarez's book is that it shows how these gains in consciousness on the part of women were not straightforwardly developmental, that learning and consciousness raising were difficult, ambiguous and contested. The story of the women's group in Jardim Miriam illustrates this complexity. In the late 1970s the domestic sewing class in the church-based women's organisation at Jardim Miriam was transformed into an occupational training course. External funds were obtained, industrial sewing machines installed and 20-25 women enrolled (pp.126-127). The three middle-class organisers wanted the course to have a political dimension:

> We were going to 'develop' these women, teach them skills so that they could become incorporated in productive labour. We decided to hold discussions about why women needed to gain skills and financial independence, why working outside the home was important for women. (p.127)

Simple texts were developed, which were then read and discussed in 'theoretical' sessions. The organisers were trying to locate the women's skills education within a wider political and economic context - they wanted the learners to relate their sewing work to their family, domestic labour and their place in the workforce. But, one of the organisers recalled:

> ... within the first three months everything we thought the course would be fell apart ... The course became their space. They spoke much more freely about a number of things from the start than we did ... things like sexuality, their intimate relationships...things we hadn't anticipated discussing in the group. (ibid.)

At the learners' request, class discussions focused less on work and more on such issues as children's education, women's socialisation and family relationships. In early 1980 a woman doctor joined the class and at the women's request began leading discussions on women's bodies and health; these topics became the focus of the class in its second year. This new focus attracted more than four times the number of participants than the 'contextualised' sewing class had (p.128). But the direction of the discussion group disturbed some of the more conservative church women in the group who 'were scandalised by the stories of back-alley abortions, extramarital relations, and sexual relations in general that typified the course's theoretical discussions by 1980-1981'. These women complained to the local priest, who told the organisers that they had not 'respected the limits of the parishioners and must stop discussing such controversial issues'. The organisers then engaged in debate with the priest, telling him that:

> ... he thought our work was absolutely secondary within the political work of the church, [we reminded him] that the women

> in our group did all the support work for the church but received no support for their own issues in return ... The women were the foundation of the church's activities in the neighbourhood ... they cleaned, cooked ... even did [the priest's] laundry.

While the priest, a strong advocate of liberation theology, appeared happy for his female parishioners to be extended on class issues and the need for 'general social transformation', he was most uncomfortable with the educational work that dealt with gender-specific issues and which challenged patriarchal church practice and doctrine (pp.128-129). After several heated discussions with the priest and extensive deliberations among the group's organisers, the women left the church and formed an autonomous women's organisation. But many neighbourhood women disagreed with this move and participation in the society declined. In early 1983 the organisers phased out the course and established a women's centre. 'A group of approximately ten local women began meeting weekly with a feminist organiser from...a group providing services to women victims of rape and domestic violence, hoping to create a similar organisation in the neighbourhood.' (pp.131-132) By late 1983 the parish priest and some local male community organisers were attacking the centre for its 'bourgeois feminism' and accusing it of 'promoting lesbianism', wanting to 'tear apart our families' and misusing funds. These attacks led some women to leave the group and to return to the church. By mid-1985 the women's centre had ceased functioning and women were again attending sewing classes in the church (p.132).

The story of the Jardim Miriam women's group encapsulates the complexities and paradoxes that shaped the women's movement and women's emancipatory learning in Brazil in the 1970s and early 1980s. Resources and support provided by the church and the Left enabled women's groups to function but at the same time constrained them. The conclusions to be drawn from this experience for popular organisations and popular educators are straightforward. Consciousness raising requires 'space for critical ideological reflection'; for this to be able to occur, material resources are necessary. The Jardim Miriam experience also contains familiar but important pedagogical lessons for adult educators. What the teacher wants for the learner the learner may not want for herself. Further, the teaching/learning process becomes productive and creative when teachers can listen to learners and provide learners with what they are asking for, as the Jardim Miriam organisers did in the early years of the industrial sewing group. Finally, the Jardim Miriam experience teaches us yet again the absolute importance of educators being alert to, and able to adjust to (and this adjustment may involve a decision to defy, and to be closed down), the ideological and political constraints within which they are working. When they are not, the space in which they are working can close down quickly anyway.

In the 1980s, complexity piled upon complexity in the Brazilian women's movement. Alvarez analyses these complexities in detail; they can only be discussed briefly here. From the 1974 congressional elections, when the tame opposition party unexpectedly became the bearer of the people's protest at military dictatorship and did well at the polls, Brazil was engaged in a process of *abertura* or political liberalisation. In 1979 the military junta split the political opposition into five parties (pp.151-153) and scheduled new congressional elections for 1982 (pp.145-146).

The creation of political parties drew many women's energies away from community organising and into electoral politics. This both directed energy away from cultural and consciousness-raising work (pp.150, 160) and exacerbated political differences in and among women's organisations (p.138). It led, for example, to two third Sao Paulo women's congresses being held in 1981: one supported by political parties, the other by feminists not associated with parties (pp.151-153). At the same time feminists were able to use electoral politics as a space for organisation and education around women's issues, endorsing candidates who supported feminist platforms (p.143).

The complex and ambiguous impact of electoral politics on women's groups can be illustrated through an examination of the experience of women in Jardim Miriam during the 1981-1982 election campaign. The two main parties in this campaign were the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party, known as PT) and the government party (the PDS). The PT was the only party with a visible presence in Jardim Miriam and other *peripheria* settlements, where it organised party nuclei which were staffed by the same activists who had been instrumental in establishing neighbourhood organisations, especially those linked to the progressive Catholic church. The neighbourhood activists were attracted by the PT's stated commitment to building a working-class party 'from the base up', a party which would become the parliamentary voice of community movements.

In 1981-1982, the organisers of the Jardim Miriam women's group made 'politics and elections' the focus of the sewing course's theoretical sessions. This appears to have been at the request of group members who expressed an interest in learning about 'this party business'. Church-provided slide shows and films on the electoral process were shown, and discussions held on the platforms of the various political parties, the organisers always coming down in favour of the PT as the only true expression of community and working-class interests. When none of the PT's local lists of candidates included women, members of the sewing class endorsed their own lists of women candidates, all of whom were feminist activists who had addressed the class over the preceding months.

Post-electoral discussion among the Jardim Miriam group's organisers, observation of the group's discussions and studies of other women's groups in the Sao Paulo *peripheria* revealed tensions between electoral activities and other purposes of these groups. Women's group members were generally more interested in discussions of sexuality, women's health, educational provision and other immediate women's and neighbourhood issues than in the election. Many women expressed ignorance of and distrust in electoral politics: 'I don't understand anything about parties.' 'Politicians only come around here when there are elections and they confuse me even then.' 'I don't fool with politics; my husband does.' Electoral politics was often seen by women as self-serving, self-interested and unethical, unlike women's work in neighbourhood groups, which was seen as work in the interests of their families and communities and as not being political. In Jardim Miriam women did not participate actively in the creation of party nuclei, and it appeared that the local PT was not a hospitable place for women. While the Jardim Miriam women's group had designated representatives to the PT, these rarely attended PT meetings and, when they did, they felt that their contributions were not taken seriously. The 'feminist' stigma that attached to organisations like the Jardim Miriam women's group in the early 1980s (see above) seems to have carried over into the PT, where women's work was often perceived as 'apolitical' or 'divisive', 'frivolous' or even 'dangerous'. (Alvarez, *ibid*., pp.154-158. For more on women and electoral politics see Alvarez, Chapter 7, pp.161-177.)

In November 1982, the major Centre-Right opposition party won a majority in the congressional elections (pp.162, 198). In 1983, under pressure from the IMF to adopt 'structural adjustment' measures to deal with Brazil's economic crisis and gargantuan debt generated by the 'economic miracle' of the .1960s and 1970s, the Brazilian government moved peremptorily from a position of hostility to family planning to articulating a coherent family planning program that reflected what many feminists had been demanding. This move at first confounded Brazilian feminists, accustomed as they were to distrusting the State. In the succeeding months feminists had to unlearn the assumption that any state-sponsored family planning initiative would be coercive, and develop ways of engaging with and influencing state policy. Alvarez gives a detailed account of this process and concludes that the women's movement had some success in making this adjustment (pp.178-197).

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But, as the feminist movement learned to work 'in and against the state' on the family planning and other issues, moving from a politics of resistance and protest to a politics of influencing policy, new complications emerged. The continuing economic crisis, the intractable foreign debt and the IMF's draconian 'remedy' circumscribed the state's capacity to meet women's demands. The 'masculinity' of Brazilian politics meant that women's programs, such as child care, were often the first to be cut, such cuts being justified by reference to women's traditional roles (child care, for example, was said to be 'women's work'), (p.223). By the late 1980s there was a strong feeling among feminists interviewed by Alvarez that 'institutions had swallowed up the movement' and that many women formerly active in the women's movement had been 'conservatised' and 'neutralised' through their participation in political parties and state institutions. Intergenerational divisions were emerging between 'historic' and younger feminists, the latter sometimes misinterpreting the roles older feminists had played in earlier struggles. Divisions, too, developed between 'cultural' feminists, who maintained that they could best influence the world through the arts and the media, and activists, who continued to do more traditional educational and political work. Splits were also developing between black and white feminists, with the former creating their own organisations (pp.221-234).

By the late 1980s there had been a general failure to develop 'organic' ties between political parties and women's organisations, although there had been some more successful attempts to build links between the latter and trade unions. There had been some successful attempts to build coalitions of women's groups and these were having some positive impact on government policy in areas like day care and family planning. But attempts to build a national women's organisation had been undermined by political differences and manipulation. There had been innovative attempts to deal with violence against women, including the establishment of police precincts staffed solely by women. But such state initiatives seem to have undermined and deactivated existing autonomous groups concerned with violence against women. Finally, many of the most experienced and effective movement activists had been drawn into the state apparatus (pp.234-247).

Conclusions and directions

What then does the Brazilian experience tell us about the relationship of adult learning and social movement activity?

Alvarez points out that, while economic and political changes may create the material conditions for social movement activity, these changes do not necessarily generate such activity. For people to become actively involved in social movements, something must happen to their consciousness - they must see that action is necessary and possible. Alvarez points to the crucial role of the oppositional discourses of human rights, social justice, feminism and liberation theology in creating the subjective conditions for political action in Brazilian women's movements. She also gives a detailed account of the micropolitics of these movements. It is these emphases that makes Alvarez's book so interesting for adult educators. Her analytical framework takes account of both macro-economic and political factors and micro political factors. Her focus on discourse provides a bridge between this rich contextualised analysis of social movement activity and an analysis of adult learning, because the process of engaging with oppositional discourses is a *learning* process. But Alvarez provides little detailed information about these learning processes in individuals, which is the sort of data that we must have if we are to build up a rich picture of learning in social movements.

In this paper I am trying to 'read in' a learning dimension to Alvarez's data. In the previous section I have made some attempt to read this dimension into Alvarez's narrative of Brazilian women's movements, but have been constrained by the lack of detailed data on learning processes in these movements. In this section I will attempt to theorise this learning dimension more coherently. The starting point in this theorisation is contestation theory, which points to the universality of domination and of resistance to domination. As Terry Eagleton (1990, p.167) has observed, human history can be interpreted as being characterised by domination, by 'the mind-shaking reality of consistent, unending, unruptured oppression and exploitation'. Feudalism, capitalism, state socialism - all have been systems of domination. But if domination is universal, it is also continually resisted or contested, so history may also be seen as a continual struggle by ordinary people to maintain or extend control over their lives. The story of this struggle is one of gains and losses, of progress and retreat, and of a growing recognition of the *continually contested, complex, ambiguous, and contradictory* nature of the struggle between domination and liberation. This struggle also has a learning and educational dimension which emerges when we examine concrete situations.

Brazil's recent history is a textbook case of this dialectic of oppression and resistance. In 1964 the mild reformism of the Goulart years was terminated by a military coup. The junta used conservative women's organisations and traditional feminine symbolism in its ideological offensive preparatory to the coup. By 1967 the authoritarianism of the junta had generated resistance by workers, women and students. This resistance was stiffened by the junta's economic strategy which pushed peasants off the land, created labour reserves on the outskirts of the cities and forced men and women to work for below-subsistence wages. This in turn made women's labour essential for the survival of working-class families and generated political activity around a range of issues: the cost of living, the need for urban services, child care, the low wages of domestic servants, human rights abuses. By the mid-1970s women's organisations were well established in the *peripheria* and were supported by the Catholic Church and the Marxist Left. The junta initially tried to repress this flowering of community-based political activity. Then, as the dictatorship's economic strategy created a chronic crisis and Brazil was increasingly drawn into the IMF's structural adjustment net, the junta was forced into a form of controlled political liberalisation, involving the legalisation of political parties and the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections.

This macro-analysis gives a broad-brush picture of developments in Brazil from the early 1960s to the early 1990s. A micro-political analysis reveals complexity layered upon complexity. So, for example, while the progressive shift in Catholicism in the 1960s (Vatican II, liberation theology, Christian base communities) brought material and ideological support to Brazilian women's organisations, churchmen's deep-seated essentialist view of women and their patriarchal practices produced conflicts which at times undermined progressive political work. Similarly, interactions and alliances between working-class women and left-wing middle-class activists both supported and complicated the activities of women's organisations in the *peripheria*.

Case-study analysis also reveals that community-based women's organisations were important emancipatory learning sites. In these organisations women were able to develop a critical analysis of the material and ideological forces that shaped their lives. Over the 25 years that Alvarez examines, there was a growing recognition among women of the specificity of women's struggles and a clearer assertion of women's interests. There was also a growing recognition of the diversity of women's experiences and of a need for alliances based on a recognition of difference. There were also increasing complexities and difficulties as women's energies were drawn into electoral politics and struggles around state-sponsored policies.

What then can be said about learning and education in Brazilian women's movements during this period? Most obviously we can say that women's social movement activity had a learning dimension. But what exactly does this mean? Well, it means a number of things. Women's organisations and struggles constituted important *spaces* for learning. Learning requires time, and opportunity for discussion and reflection. Women's organisations provided these. *Critical* learning extends the learner, moves her beyond her current understanding. As we have seen, such learning developed in Brazilian women's organisations. *Emancipatory* learning involves learning generating emancipatory action. Again, this occurred in the Brazilian situation.

But exactly what is involved in critical and emancipatory learning? How do learners move beyond their current understanding, and become motivated to act in emancipatory ways? Alvarez's reference to the importance of oppositional discourses in 'shaping the subjective possibilities' for political action is of interest here, and can be usefully linked to the contestation problematic referred to above. Contestation theory helps us to understand the learning dimension of social movement activity. Contestation theory asserts the universality in human society of domination and of resistance to domination. It argues that domination and resistance have both a material and an ideological dimension: they originate and are constructed in relations of production and power, but are also constructed and played out in ideologies and discourses, i.e. in the ways in which people make meaning of situations and represent them. So domination and resistance come to be internalised, to be embedded in people's consciousness, i.e. they are *learned* (Foley 1994, 1995). Foucault and others (Ball 1990) have focused on the role of language in positioning people in relations of domination and subordination in particular sites - schools, hospitals, prisons, and so forth. Their interest is in the ways in which discourses, defined as systematic sets of meanings circulating around the practices of particular institutions, are constructed and played out (Lee and Wickert 1995, pp.136-137). Our interest here is the relationship of these discourses to emancipatory learning and action.

Alvarez's study points to, but does not really develop an analysis of, the role of oppositional discourses in developing women's political consciousness and action in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Yet there is sufficient data to enable us to begin to 'read in' such an analysis.

The discourse of Brazilian women's movements was one of critique, demand and rights. The process by which this discourse was articulated and learned was one of participation in community-based organisations and campaigns. The core campaigns of women's organisations in the *peripheria* in the 1960s and 1970s - the cost-of-living and day-care campaigns - rested on a denunciation of miserable living conditions and made very clear political demands: for price freezes, day-care centres and so forth.

The campaigns employed mobilising and educative tactics like neighbourhood surveys and open letters, tactics which involved large numbers of people and educated them about both the issues and forms of action. As these campaigns went on, the women involved in them became clearer about the nature of the state and its agents ('They lied to us') and how to deal with them ('If we're pressing them, things will happen').

What emerged in the neighbourhood struggles of Brazilian women in the 1960s and 1970s was an activist discourse, one which emphasised the importance of women acting on their own situations, and of them not being able to rely on others to act for them:

> If we leave it up to them we'll never get anything we need in the neighbourhood.
>
> We would go up there, fifteen or twenty or more of us, whenever we thought things were being held up.

This discourse was one of rights and demands. The rights that were demanded were those of women: 'As mothers we demanded a place to leave our children'. The process by which women learned to articulate these demands was gradual, sometimes torturous: 'Little by little we confirmed, in practice, the universality of certain sensations: the uneasiness or unrest of 'being female', the feeling of suffering some injustice without exactly understanding its proportions.'

This discourse, too, was characterised by a growing awareness of the specificity of women's experience and oppression:

> Women suffer much more with problems of sex.
>
> Women also suffer a specific oppression because of the simple fact of being a woman.
>
> Women ... are ... doubly oppressed: as women and as a class.
>
> The women in our group did all the support work for the church but received no support for their own issues in return.

The discourse of Brazilian women's movements also encompassed a recognition of the universality and diversity of women's experience. While Brazilian women learned of the connections between them and of the importance of solidarity ('we cannot say goodbye now...we must continue to struggle together'), they also learned of the diversity of their political experiences and ideologies and of the ways in which these differences could be exploited by men (as in the Jardim Miriam's women's group in the early 1980s, and in electoral politics).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, then, Brazilian women acquired a sophisticated political discourse, one that represented the complexities of their situations and which empowered them to act against oppression. The acquisition of this discourse was for these women a radical, transformative learning experience. The experience of Brazilian women also shows that, while emancipatory learning is cumulative and developmental, it is not linear, it is embedded in conflict, and it is often unanticipated. So, for example, Johnson and Johnson intended to sell sanitary napkins in Jardin Miriam, not to establish an activist women's organisation there. Ten years later, in the same neighbourhood, three middle-class organisers set out to establish a skills training course, not a discussion group that would develop a critical analysis and action around a wide range of women's issues.

The Brazilian experience also demonstrates the absolute importance of genuine democracy in education and politics. As we have seen, the Jardin Miriam women's group developed its own analysis and agenda for action. The educators - the three organisers - were able to work with the women because they listened to them. The organisers did not try to impose their own analysis or agenda on the women, or to prevent the women from developing theirs. Instead, the organisers allowed the course to become the women's space and resourced (and no doubt helped to structure, although we are not told this) the women's ongoing critical discussion.

Alvarez provides us with a very useful framework for analysing learning in social movements. Her data on Brazilian women's organisations suggests that encountering oppositional discourses is crucial in raising people's consciousness and preparing them for emancipatory action. In other words, the learning of these discourses provides a crucial bridge between the macro-economic and political conditions that prepare the ground for social action, and the social action itself. In the book I am currently writing I will examine these learning processes in greater detail, through an examination of learning and education in various forms of social action.

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Chapter 4

Learning centres and community houses: Twelve more years

Bernie Neville

Introduction

> The **Neighbourhood House,** the **Learning Centre**, the **Community House** are all terms which have become increasingly familiar to readers of newspapers in the years since the early 70s. At that time, in the excitement which surrounded their beginnings, these labels seemed to carry meanings with stronger implications for radical change than is the case today.
>
> Ten years further on it seems appropriate to consider whether or not these assorted but generally similar centres ever did contain within their activities and constitutions the germs of social change of any kind. If so, one needs to be directed towards the evidence of such change and, if not, it is perhaps an even more intriguing task to trace what elements may have been at work to effectively neutralise the forces for change within the movement.

The preceding paragraphs are taken from the introduction to a report which Lyn Kennedy and I wrote on the state of neighbourhood houses in Victoria in the early 1980s. The report was based on a study of 13 such centres over a two-year period (1981-82). It was carried out at a time when extensive political change was occurring within the field of adult education and within local and state government. The information on which the report was based came from interviews with coordinators, committee members and 'clients' of the centres, together with documentary records and extended observation. The sample of centres was as representative as we could make it, balancing metropolitan and rural, working class and middle class, 'old' and 'new' centres. Analysis of the material focused on six major aspects: the stated aims of the centre, its structure, the kinds of activities engaged in, the people who used it, financial resources and policies, the extent of connection with other local community centres and networks. In the analysis of the material it became evident that this sample of centres did have a number of distinctive features in common.

Focus on women

The most striking feature of all the centres was the predominance of women, and particularly of young women who were 'at home' with young families, who served on the committees and rosters and attended classes. Only one of the centres had a strong male component. Two of the centres openly acknowledged that women were their primary concern, included the word 'women's' in their title, and actively pursued 'women's issues'. However, in most centres interviewees rejected the label 'feminist' and argued that too overt a feminist stance would drive women away from the centre.

Caring and sharing

The centres were fundamentally similar in the emphasis given to group support. This aspect appeared most strongly in those centres operating in working-class areas. Here there was some overt attention given to 'welfare' functions of the centres. However, caring and sharing seemed to have greater verbal prominence in the centres in more affluent areas, where they had set up structures specifically aimed at developing self-help and self-confidence. Many of the interviewees spoke of the centre as a haven in which people could escape the stress and violence of the world outside.

Classes

A third common feature was the prominence of more or less formal classes in the centres' programs of activities. To the outside observer it might appear that such classes were the *raison-d'être* of the centres' existence. However, it was frequently pointed out that classes were essentially a 'front' for the more important social function of the centres, in drawing together people who were isolated, bored or powerless. It was sometimes reported that people turned up for 'something or other' every day and that some people repeated the same classes over and over. In all centres included in the study there was a sense of excitement about learning, with enthusiastic teachers conveying the satisfaction they experienced in teaching intelligent, undereducated women, whether in formal or informal classes.

Scale and formality

There was a general preference for the small-scale, informal and unobtrusive, especially as regards premises. This was sometimes strongly expressed by coordinators who said they would be unwilling to move to a larger, more impressive building if it was offered to them. Keeping the centre homely and unthreatening was generally perceived as an essential element in the centre's accessibility to women, whose low self-esteem and inability to identify with the role of student would always keep them from entering the TAFE college on the next block.

The learning centre career

In the five centres which ran formal classes of study in HSC and TOP subjects, four were in middle-class areas and one was attached to a TAFE college in a working-class area. However, it was commonplace in all centres for people's initial involvement to be via an art or craft class. It was apparent from interviews with coordinators and teachers that this focus on the arts was not an end in itself but was a means of developing women's confidence and competence to the point where they could take leadership roles in the centre and the wider community. Consciousness raising towards a wider social/political responsibility was usually deemed an essential ingredient of centre practice. Teachers and tutors, whether paid or voluntary, were generally expected to be committed to such ends.

Structures

It was very apparent that the structures of the centres bore little resemblance to the conventional Weberian hierarchical bureaucracy. In our analysis of this aspect of the centres we used Galtung's distinction between alpha structures (vertical / hierarchical / segmented / dependent / complex) and beta structures (horizontal / egalitarian / participative / integrative / simple). It seemed to us that the people in these centres worked consciously and consistently to avoid the characteristics of alpha structures. Their focus on non-material needs (creativity, identity, relationship, understanding, esteem) appeared to be well served by the preferred beta structure, which was affirmed by the avowed ideology of most of the centres.

Tendencies detected, dangers feared

In the 1981-82 study we became aware of certain pressures, internal and external, which were pushing the centres towards specific kinds of change in ideology and practice.

• a shift towards alpha structures

Some of the centres seemed to be adopting more hierarchical structures. All but two of the centres had been started by a group of volunteers with an ethos of shared responsibility, open meetings, minimal role differentiation and the sharing of tasks on an equitable basis. Their very success had necessitated the employment of full-time, salaried coordinators, as radical democracy proved too cumbersome a mechanism for decision-making. An increasing sense of the centres as providers of educational services (a label which had originally been strongly resisted) led them to adopt more vertical structures in the name of productivity and efficiency. There was a good deal of awareness of, and resistance to, this shift. Its effects were being countered in various ways, e.g. through rotation of roles, but it seemed to be generally accepted that centres had to be 'properly organised' if they were to be effective.

• reliance on funding

Expansion of programs had led to an increasing reliance on funding from local and state government. In the course of ten years these centres had moved from a position where they were delighted to find premises in which they could carry on their entirely voluntary functions, to one in which they need continuing funding to keep employing their administrative staff, teachers and child carers. There had obviously been a great deal of soul-searching associated with this development, and it appeared that neither the soul-searching nor the development was yet at an end.

• mainstreaming

An associated shift appeared to be taking the centres away from an essentially alternative, even revolutionary, approach to education (or 'educational delivery' as centre staff were learning to call it) to a situation where they were becoming 'providers' of mainstream education programs. Links with TAFE and the Council of Adult Education were becoming stronger and more obvious. However, there was some resistance to moving from 'outsider' to 'insider' status. Besides, coordinators and staff were

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inclined to contrast the totally participative centres of the 'good old days' with those of the present where women might come to do a couple of VCE subjects without any involvement in the centre philosophy or the centre life, availing themselves of the supports provided by the centre without responding in kind, and then proceeding to university or elsewhere with no sense of responsibility to the centre and no attempt to maintain contact.

- **loss of autonomy**

The fear of losing autonomy was clearly associated in people's minds with funding and mainstreaming. TAFE in particular was seen as a threat to the autonomy of the centres, though two of the centres which actually had close relations with TAFE appeared to be handling the relationship in a way which preserved their independence. There were voices in most of the centres who maintained that the only way they could preserve the ideals which had drawn them from the beginning was to reject external funding and become truly self-supporting. Otherwise they would cease to be genuine community organisations and become agents for the top-down delivery of educational services by a more powerful institution.

1982 saw the beginning of 10 years of Labor government in Victoria. There were significant structural changes in the education system and a continued tendency towards the commodification of education and the privileging of economic criteria over all others in evaluating education provision. The Cain/Kirner government's own attempts at economic efficiency were not particularly successful and 1992 brought the Kennett Liberal government, with a strong economic rationalist agenda. Local government was subjected to profound structural change, and education and welfare funding was severely cut.

In this context we attempted to replicate the 1981-82 study. In 1993 we commenced another two-year study to investigate whether the policies and practices of neighbourhood houses and learning centres had changed significantly in the intervening time. We intended to study the same 13 centres as in the earlier study, update our documentation and ask the same questions.

Perhaps the most striking finding is that the centres are still there! One of the centres is now a community health centre and no longer offers classes. One of them has closed. The other eleven are still functioning in much the same way as they were in 1982. Outside this sample the neighbourhood-house phenomenon has certainly not diminished. In 1982 we could identify approximately 150 neighbourhood houses in Victoria. In 1994 there were over 300.

When we undertook this second study, our interest focused on looking at the way centres must have changed with the changing political and economic environment from 1982-1994. In fact, our preliminary analysis of the data seems to indicate that, while there has been some change along the lines we might have predicted, it does not appear to have significantly affected the culture of the centres.

Our interest now focuses on a more intriguing question: How did these centres manage to preserve a culture and an educational philosophy which are essentially at odds with the political consensus as to the purpose of education and the most appropriate ways of providing it?

How is it that, in an education sector that is immersed in a fantasy of economic rationalism, we find flourishing neighbourhood houses which reiterate the same aims and values they did 10 or even 20 years ago?

- to provide a welcoming, safe place for the community to meet in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere, enabling a growth in self-esteem and personal development.

  or

- to provide quality individual development, both socially and educationally in a non-profit, informal environment

  or

- to develop a strong sense of community and belonging

  or

- to provide a community access centre where people can come together in an atmosphere of equality, friendship and trust, sharing their skills and experiences in order to improve the quality of their lives.

And how have they managed to hang on to such an archaic performance criterion as this?

> The success of the house is measured in terms of the number of people actively involved who are supportive of each other and are gaining confidence in their own lives.

There are differences, however. For one thing, the documentation is different. The 1993-1994 documentation tends towards dot-pointed aims and objectives, SWAT analyses, lines of accountability, performance criteria, vision statements and management plans. In response to the sources of funding we find *Skillshare* and *Train the trainer* and frequent references to *competencies*. We find more attention given to the particular needs of the unemployed, the disabled, and people of non-English-speaking background.

The centres still essentially cater for women. All 13 maintain an emphasis on emotional support, both in their rhetoric and in their behaviour. They still identify themselves as educational rather than welfare institutions. A couple of them have moved to more impressive premises, and connections with TAFE are more apparent. There are complaints of diminishing democracy in the way a couple of centres are administered, but others have taken strategic steps to ensure that a participative governance is maintained. There seems to be somewhat less rhetoric about changing society and somewhat more about meeting people's needs. The movement seems to have 'mainstreamed' and the centre coordinators seem to spend a lot of time chasing money, but the sources of funds appear to be more diverse than they were 10 years ago, and there does not seem to have been a significant loss of autonomy.

I hope further analysis will enable me to be more precise about this, but this seems to be the broad picture.

Neighbourhood houses are still very much alive. They do not seem to have suffered the demoralisation which has come upon the rest of the education enterprise in Victoria. Now I would like to know why.

Chapter 5

The ethics of ethics committees

Michael Crotty

Of late, ethics committees have been the target of significant criticism. Much of the criticism relates to ways in which ethics committees go about their task of defining and prescribing ethical research behaviour and, as well, to the way in which that task comes to be extended from ruling on ethical/non-ethical conduct to ruling on acceptable/non-acceptable methodology.

This article, too, institutes a critique of ethics committees. It is not, however, a critique of ethics committees that fail to do their job acceptably, for it targets all ethics committees, even the best. Nor is it a critique that challenges their right to deal with the appropriateness or adequacy of methodology, though their claim to that right is surely challengeable enough. This critique is one that challenges their doing what their very name suggests is their *raison-d'être*. It calls into question the right and competence of ethics committees to declare in an authoritative way on what is, or is not, *ethical* behaviour or to demand conformity to their norms precisely as *ethical* norms.

The meaning of ethics

A discussion of this kind should be as unambiguous as possible. Before we proceed any further, we need to determine what the word 'ethics' means in this context. If we go to, say, the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1988, p.605), we find that it is far from being a univocal term.

In the first place, *ethics* is 'a system of moral principles, by which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad or right or wrong'. It can also mean the 'moral principles' themselves. In the same vein, *ethical* means 'pertaining to or dealing with morals or the principles of morality; pertaining to right and wrong in conduct'.

However, there is another meaning of ethics spelled out for us here. *Ethics* means, as well, 'the rules of conduct recognised in respect of a particular class of human actions: *medical ethics*'. *Ethical* now means 'in accordance with the rules or standards for right conduct or practice, esp. the standards of a profession: *it is not considered ethical for doctors to advertise*'. In this usage, ethics has nothing to do with morality but stands for 'proper' ways of behaving for members of a profession or other group. Advertising, for example, does not suddenly become an immoral act when it is done by a medico. In fact, it is only some forms of advertising that are ruled out for medical practitioners. Hanging out a shingle is fine. Putting the same words in the local rag may not be. Here ethics is glorified etiquette. It calls for the observance of accepted protocols and traditional conventions.

What an ethics committee intends by the word is often not stated explicitly. Just as often it tends to be made clear in other ways. For example, the chairperson of one ethics committee is renowned for the 'sermon' on ethics he gives to would-be researchers. Ethics, he tells his listeners, is what holds human society together. Those listeners are left in no doubt about his understanding of ethics as it relates to the work of his committee. In appealing to them to be genuinely moral in all their research activities, he is offering the committee's norms as ways in which the morality of their behaviour as researchers can be ensured. These norms are undoubtedly meant to be taken as ethical norms in the full and most profound sense.

This is certainly how the word 'ethics' is understood in the study Maria Ginzler and her associates undertook into the performance of ethics committees in health services research. That performance is shown to be affected by the fact that, of 'the three principal theories of ethics: the ethics of virtue and of duty, which are essentially individualistic, and the ethic of the common good, which is a social consideration', medical ethics has traditionally dwelt within one while much of health services research is based upon another (Ginzler *et al.* 1990, p.195).

In his 'Using a code of research ethics', Bibby leaves no doubt about his understanding of ethics either. The point of adopting a code of ethics, his readers learn, 'is, obviously, to improve morally the practice of researchers'. Bibby includes 'moral education' as one of several other possible aims for a code of ethics and he refers to 'moral problems' and 'moral issues'. Moral theory is involved too. 'If people agree about moral theories,' says Bibby, 'it makes agreement about moral issues easy (relatively, anyway).' Still, there will inevitably be disputes about moral theory and Bibby considers it 'practically impossible for a large organisation to hope for agreement or adherence to a single moral theory'. More than that, there are those who 'will conduct morally unacceptable research if they can get away with it, whatever codes exist'. Interestingly, and significantly, he describes such people as 'scoundrels'.

While Bibby is measured, fair-minded and even tolerant in his views on how codes of ethics should be devised and administered, it is abundantly clear that, in his understanding of such codes, ethics really does mean ethics (Bibby 1993, pp.49-56).

The ethics of codes and committees

What if one were to suggest that, in issuing, imposing or administering norms of conduct for researchers, ethics committees are not dealing - and, indeed, cannot deal - with ethics in the full sense of the word? This would mean that a committee's set of norms *as such* has nothing to do with morality in that full sense. Rather, it is to be seen as outlining the kind of behaviour with which the research community is deemed willing to be associated and the kind of behaviour from which it would want to dissociate itself.

There may be many reasons for including particular rules in such a code. Fear of litigation may be one. The desire to avoid criticism, especially public scandal, is another. The intention to foster cooperation may be yet another. Rules inserted for such reasons are not ethical norms in the dictionary's first sense of the word 'ethical'.

Voices may well be raised in protest at this point. The ethical norms found in codes or promulgated by ethics committees are not all like that, are they? Nor are they all imposed for such purposes. What about the requirement of informed consent, for example? Isn't this a question of protecting a basic human right? Surely it is truly unethical, a genuine issue of right and wrong, for a researcher to do something to an unsuspecting or unconsenting member of the public. If that is so, isn't an ethics committee within its rights to preclude this behaviour simply on the grounds that it is immoral conduct?

Almost instinctively, most people will feel urged to say 'yes' to this question - and to say it with gusto. All the same, there are a number of reasons for hesitating to do so.

For a start, think about one of the statements we have just made. It begins, 'Surely it is truly unethical...' *Surely*? Those familiar with the literature of ethics may well find it hard to be sure about anything. The story of ethics presents a welter of opposed opinions and stances. The disagreement is not only about the morality of concrete actions in specific situations but about fundamental ethical principles, even the nature of ethics itself. Diversity of viewpoint can be said, in fact, to be of the very essence of the ethical enterprise. Early in his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle warns us that, in studying 'the character of the good', the best we can hope for is 'a rough outline of the truth' and 'broad conclusions'. In ethics, as elsewhere, 'we must be content if we attain as high a degree of certainty as the matter of it admits' (Aristotle, 1953, p.15).

As it happens, ethics admits precious little certainty, if any at all. Whatever about general moral values, it can be said that it admits no certainties in the area of concrete human actions. Take the example we have just been considering: Is it necessarily immoral to do something to people without their knowledge and consent? Ethicists would not be agreed that it is. Many would suggest that we do precisely that many times over in the course of our day-to-day lives. Why, they would want to ask, does it suddenly become an immoral act when done by a researcher?

This has direct implications for an ethics committee. How could a committee ever be able to declare with certainty that what it is prescribing is morally right or that what it is proscribing is morally wrong?

This is not a problem that troubles Bibby. He places his faith in the wisdom of ethics committees. A code cannot deal with all situations, but a committee can do what a code cannot do. In a case of conflict, where there has been recourse to the professional association and the local ethics committee and these rule against the complainant, Bibby feels the latter must accept the ruling. 'If a researcher is not persuaded by the combined opposition of the professional and institutional ethics committees, it is time that they learned of their own fallibility' (Bibby, 1993, pp.61-62). In Bibby's view, given that he relates 'ethics' in this context to genuine moral issues as such, ethics committees are competent to rule authoritatively on matters of morality.

Yet morality, as many moralists see it, is not like that. Morality, in the end, is a matter for conscience. Not even combined ethics committees can dictate to individuals what they are morally bound to do.

Legal moralism

Were ethics committees able to impose moral judgments as such, they would enjoy a competence that a large number of ethicists and philosophers of law deny even to the State. Here we are raking over the coals of a famous and long-lived controversy. This is the notorious question of 'legal moralism'. Has the State the right to forbid a form of behaviour simply on the ground that it is regarded as immoral?

The discussion of this issue goes back to the 19th century and John Stuart Mill. For Mill, preventing harm to others constitutes the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over members of a civilised community against their will. He insists that 'when a person's conduct affects the interests of no person besides himself, or needs not affect them unless they like (all the persons concerned being of full age, and the ordinary amount of understanding)... there should be perfect freedom, legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences' (Mill, 1946, p.67).

If Mill is right, it follows that the State cannot forbid behaviour simply because it is 'immoral'. After all, immorality does not necessarily involve harm to others. Moreover, the harmfulness to others envisaged in law is selective and defined not by moralists or moral agents on moral grounds but by the State on legal and social grounds.

In large measure the ideal of the liberal society which Mill espoused came eventually to prevail. The same cannot be said of his views on legal moralism. His most notable foe at the time was barrister and later judge, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen. Stephen has no qualms about this matter. While he accepts that it is counterproductive to regulate matters like 'the internal affairs of a family' or 'the relations of love or friendship', he points to 'acts of wickedness so gross and outrageous that, self-protection apart, they must be prevented as far as possible at any cost to the offender, and punished, if they occur, with exemplary severity' (Stephen, 1967, p.162). For him, 'criminal law is in the nature of a persecution of the grosser forms of vice' (1967, p.152).

While the controversy over legal moralism waned, it never died and in the 1950s and early 1960s it came to the fore again with a vengeance. The Wolfenden Committee was appointed in 1954 to consider the state of British law regarding prostitution and homosexuality. Inherent in its recommendations is a view of what the law of the land, and criminal law in particular, is about. It is not about the enforcement of morality as such. Instead, the law exists

> ... to preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive or injurious, and to provide sufficient safeguards against exploitation or corruption of others, particularly those who are specially vulnerable because they are young, weak in body or mind, inexperienced, or in a state of special physical, official or economic dependence. (Wolfenden Committee 1963, §13, pp.23-24.)

Two things follow from this approach.

First of all, it has to be accepted that there is a wide spectrum of behaviour which some people in society - most people in society, even - might regard as definitely and highly immoral but which does not involve public disorder, public indecency, offence or injury to others, or exploitation of young or otherwise vulnerable people. According to the principles espoused in the Wolfenden Report, the Government has no right to legislate against such behaviour. As the Committee puts it, 'there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business' (1963, §61, p.48). The Committee had been encouraged in this position by the support given by the Church of England Moral Welfare Council and the Roman Catholic Advisory Committee. These bodies, both of which participated in the Committee hearings, agreed that 'it is not the business of the State to intervene in the purely private sphere, but to act solely as the defender of the common good' (in Chesser 1958, p.14).

It has to be accepted, secondly, that, where the law does legislate against a form of behaviour, presumably because it involves public disorder, public indecency, offence or injury to others, or exploitation of young or otherwise vulnerable people, its doing so neither makes the behaviour immoral nor constitutes any kind of authoritative declaration that the behaviour is immoral. Legislators can make something illegal and even criminal but they lack the authority to make it immoral. They can declare something illegal and criminal but they lack the competence to declare something immoral. In normal circumstances, I as a citizen cannot flout the law and choose to regard as legal what the State has declared to be illegal. However, I am under no compulsion as a citizen to regard as immoral what the law of the land has proscribed. In fact, in seeking to determine for myself whether the behaviour in question is immoral, I may well choose to regard its legal status as totally irrelevant to that issue.

This accords with the position expressed by H. L. A. Hart in the wake of the Wolfenden Committee's findings.

> Hart's theory implies that sound criticism of behavior can be grounded on the existence of either legal or moral standards. One may be held at fault for failing to live up to a legal obligation just as one may be held at fault in the moral case. The conditions under which the two kinds of standard may be said to exist are different, and the two sets of requirements are not coextensive. (Lyons 1984, p.71)

This distinction between legal and moral obligation is reflected in the term 'legal positivism', often used as a straight-out antonym to 'legal moralism' (although it should be noted that some theorists, like van Eikema Hommes [1979, p.208], prefer a narrower definition).

Historically, the word 'positive' has served to distinguish positive law from natural law. Positive law is law enacted by human beings. Its power rests on what is 'posited', i.e. something given as a basis. In the case of positive law, this basis is the very *existence of the legislation*, so that actions contrary to positive law, if they are to be seen as wrong at all, are wrong only because they are forbidden (*malum quia prohibitum*). To the contrary, the power of natural law is claimed to rest on the *kind of action* that is in question. Actions contrary to natural law are seen to be prohibited because they are wrong (*prohibitum quia malum*).

Positivism derives from the use of the word 'positive' in this and similar contexts. To describe the rejection of legal moralism as legal positivism is to insist that the State's legal competence extends to the enactment of positive law only and to demand that its legislation be always viewed and presented in this light. Today many shy away from the word 'positivism' because of its later history and the connotations it now brings in its train. We may need to remind ourselves that the notion of legal positivism well and truly predated Auguste Comte's sociological positivism. It came into prominence when 'the idea of natural law collapsed in the face of the attack against it by the Historical School at the start of the 19th century' (van Eikema Hommes, 1979, p.207). It does not share the epistemological assumptions we have come to associate with positivism as the term later came to be used.

Human rights

At this point in the discussion of legal moralism it is not unusual for the notion of human rights to be invoked. It may be argued that there are clearly established human rights which are the birthright of every human being and that these can provide a firm foundation for laws imposing morality. After all, there are now a host of national and international codes which list human rights and demand respect for them. Where an action violates an established human right, can it not be said that this is undeniably an immoral form of behaviour and that a government has an incontrovertible right to forbid it precisely as such?

As it happens, the waters are as muddy in the area of human rights as they are in the area of morality in general. Since human rights and morality are inextricably bound up with each other, this is hardly surprising. It is not just that there are respected thinkers who believe that the human rights listed in the codes have not, in fact, been 'clearly established'. Some go so far as to suggest that human rights can *never* be clearly established.

True enough, writers like George Weigel of Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center argue passionately that human rights are both establishable and universal. However, as Weigel himself accepts, this claim rests on a number of presuppositions about human being. It calls for a philosophical anthropology of a certain kind.

> Thus, if religious freedom is the first of human rights, then the moral claim embedded in the notion of 'human freedom' is as valid in Shanghai, Riyadh, and Mogadishu as it is in Washington, D.C. and Peoria. If the essence of human personhood precludes treating women as property for purposes of marriage, then that is true in Khartoum no less than in Baltimore. If the notion of the equality of persons before the law rests on certain irreducible features of humanness, then the equality of persons before the law ought to be recognized in Singapore as well as in the Cook County courthouse. And these moral claims are true, no matter how different may be the social and political forms developed in different societies to embody the universal principles of religious freedom, freedom to marry, and legal equality. (Weigel 1995, p.45)

This statement is unmistakably reminiscent of Cicero and the natural-law tradition. 'And,' writes Cicero in *De re publica* (1928, p.211), 'there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times.' With his 'essence of human personhood' and 'irreducible features of humanness', Weigel stands, at least broadly, in this tradition. The notion of universality he espouses 'rests on the idea that we can speak meaningfully of a "human nature" in which a certain moral logic is hard-wired'. This, he acknowledges, is 'a wholly unfashionable notion regarded as vaguely medieval and definitely "unenlightened" in many Western academic and political-intellectual circles today' (Weigel, 1995, p.45).

Weigel is right. His understanding of the philosophical grounds of human rights is rejected by many contemporary thinkers. To accept it requires that one adhere to the Scholastic perspective with its natural-law tradition, or a Lockean viewpoint with its natural-rights tradition, or something similar. None of these are approaches that current thought, by and large, finds congenial. Far from admitting the possibility of identifying a ready-made, definable 'human nature' that could ground the notion of equally definable human rights, many contemporary philosophical and social theorists see humanness in far more evolutionary terms. For them it is something dynamic, an entity to be constructed, a reality that emerges only in historical forms and culturally diverse ways. Like everything else in our human world *qua* human world, rights are contingent rather than necessary, relative (because culture-specific) rather than absolute, and precarious rather than resting on unshakeable foundations. 'Their recognition is unequal and disparate from one era and culture to another', writes Chilean academic Garreton M, for they are 'basically historical-cultural constructs' (1994, pp.221-222).

From a more epistemological point of view, it is highly problematic for Weigel to assert that his moral claims about human rights are '*true*' (yes, he italicises the word) independently of the social and political forms in which rights come to be embodied in different societies. For a very long time now, there has been no shortage of epistemologists and social theorists asserting that, looked at independently of context, nothing at all can be said to be true, since every meaningful entity is necessarily an historical and social construction.

Post-modernist thought goes further still. How much sense does it make to claim that anything, even when viewed *in* context, is simply true or not true? Today we are being invited by post-modernism to say 'No!' to cherished foundational principles, i.e. to undo habits of thought whereby we view ourselves as centred and autonomous and our world as knowable and predictable. In the post-modernist world that has sprung up around us, Weigel's italicised *true* will appear to many as quaint and quixotic.

However, one does not have to be post-modernist or even constructionist to reject the notion of human rights as a foundation for moral legalism. One has only to acknowledge that human rights lack an apodictic philosophical or ethical grounding.

It would be difficult to deny that they do. 'Unfortunately,' writes Freeman, 'there are no uncontested philosophical foundations of human rights... It is logically and empirically possible to reject the philosophical foundations of human rights.' For Freeman, espousing human rights is a matter of making 'a nonrational decision either to accept or reject solidarity with humanity' (1994, pp.511, 514).

How sanguine can we be that a more compelling grounding of rights will emerge? Not very, if we take account of thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre, who rejects the notion of human rights altogether and asserts that 'belief in them is one with belief in witches and unicorns' (1985, p.69), or Richard Rorty, who considers 'human rights foundationalism outmoded' (1993, p.128).

> We see our task as a matter of making our own culture - the human rights culture - more self-conscious and more powerful rather than of demonstrating its superiority to other cultures by an appeal to something transcultural.' (Rorty, 1993, p.117)

That, of course, is precisely the demonstration Weigel is attempting and the appeal he is making with such passion.

However unpalatable this situation may be to us personally, the salient point here is that these views on human rights remain tenable views. People are free to hold them. How could it be otherwise when, as Davidson points out (1993, p.45), 'there is considerable debate about what rights are, where they come from, what their content is, how they relate to each other and how new rights might be properly identified'.

Given this state of affairs, a government is in no position to declare with any authority that violating an accepted human right is immoral, nor can it prohibit such a violation simply on the grounds that it is immoral. Undoubtedly, the State may define the human rights it respects, and seeks to protect, as needs that must be met if society is to function successfully and form a milieu in which individuals can live their lives and achieve their purposes without let or hindrance. Undoubtedly, too, the State may outlaw forms of behaviour that threaten these identified rights. Not only would there be no debate about the State's right to do this but even little argument about the content of the legislation, provided that the rights chosen to be protected are in line with those spelled out in codes of human rights accepted around the globe. As Davidson tells us (1993, p.24), 'there now appears to be almost universal acceptance of human rights as identifiable, concrete legal norms'. For our purposes, the operative word here is 'legal'. While commentators cited by Davidson 'state unequivocally that human rights have become a universal ideology', this by no means grounds human rights as a compelling foundation for undeniable moral obligations. Legislation to protect human rights has to be seen as positive law only. It is not an example of legal moralism and cannot be invoked as evidence that legal moralism is justified.

Ethics in a liberal society

It is not suggested here that a rejection of legal moralism is the only theoretically tenable position. For our purposes, it is not necessary to make that assertion. Nor, for any purposes, is it even possible to make that assertion. This is just as well, for legal moralism remains very much with us. It was certainly alive and well in Britain at the time of the Wolfenden Report. The Committee's stance aroused a great deal of opposition and, in a re-run of the Mill-Stephen debate a century earlier, a knight of the realm was again on hand to enter the fray. This was the eminent judge, Sir Patrick Devlin (later Lord Devlin). Where the Committee had invoked a realm of morality that is 'not the law's business', Devlin replied that the 'suppression of vice is as much the law's business as the suppression of subversive activities' (Devlin 1965, pp.13-14).

It was at this point that Oxford philosopher of law H. L. A. Hart engaged with Devlin. As Hart sees it, laws that restrict human liberty and coerce citizens into behaving in particular ways have to be justified. Devlin justifies coercion of this kind by appealing to the principle that a society has the right to take whatever steps are necessary for its preservation. Hart believes this fails to prove Devlin's point. 'There is no evidence', says Hart (1963, p.82), 'that the preservation of a society requires the enforcement of its morality "as such".'

Devlin replied to Hart and the so-called Hart-Devlin debate was underway. The 'Hart-Devlin debate attracted the attention of a number of the best-known Anglo-American writers on legal philosophy, and succeeding years saw a flurry of theoretical work on the modern implications of Mill's principle' (Grey, 1983, p.5).

This continuing debate is evidence that neither legal moralism nor legal positivism is a universally held viewpoint. It is also evidence, and this is important for our purposes here, that both are tenable viewpoints. Certainly, one is free to accept the view that the law can proscribe immoral behaviour as such. Just as certainly, however, those who feel that way cannot demand that others feel that way too. To do so would be to violate fundamentally the spirit and principles of the liberal society which nations like ours profess to be.

In his 1989 Boyer Lectures, philosopher Max Charlesworth speaks about ethical discussion in a liberal, and therefore pluralist, society. Societies such as ours, Professor Charlesworth points out, 'make a positive virtue out of this plurality of views and values and see it as a sign of social health and vitality' (1989, p.23). Not surprisingly, this pluralism causes problems for the expert boards, commissions and committees set up to deal with the complex bioethical issues facing communities today. One of Charlesworth's lectures is given over to a discussion of these bodies and he finds that the main issue raised by them is 'about their place and role in a liberal democratic society.' (1989, p.101).

In determining that place and role, the issue of legal-moralism is pivotal. Charlesworth leaves no doubt where he stands on this issue. While calling on the law to protect 'the rights of those who are unable to protect their own rights', he aligns himself in very clear-cut fashion with those who reject legal moralism in all its guises. 'In a liberal democratic and pluralist society such as ours the law is not really concerned with the enforcement of morality but rather with providing a framework of peace and order' (Charlesworth, 1989, p.119). Charlesworth returns to this theme in his *Bioethics in a Liberal Society*. There are, he asserts, three consequences that flow from the primacy which the liberal society gives to personal autonomy. The first is the sharp disjunction that needs to be made between law and morality. Inherent in that disjunction is a rejection of legal moralism: 'The law is not concerned with matters of personal morality and the "enforcement of morals".' The second consequence is the espousal of ethical pluralism. The third is the recognition that, 'apart from the commitment to the primacy of personal autonomy, there is no determinate social consensus about a set of "core values" or a "public morality" which it is the law's business to safeguard and promote' (Charlesworth, 1993, p.1).

Charlesworth proceeds to invoke personal experience he has had on committees concerned with bioethical issues. Liberal principles, he has found, often carry little weight in committee deliberations. It has been a cause of astonishment to him to find committee members adopting 'quite authoritarian and paternalistic positions wholly at odds with the values of the liberal society'. Such people, he concludes, acknowledge liberal values but are unwilling to pursue them seriously and consistently or to press them to their logical conclusions (Charlesworth. 1993, p.2).

What happens to ethics committees when liberal values *are* pressed to their logical conclusions? Charlesworth has something to say about that in the Boyer Lectures (1989, pp.96-116). Once again he portrays ethical pluralism 'not as a necessary evil but as a positive good, not as a weakness but as a strength'. At the same time, he acknowledges that such wide-ranging views make it hard for a bioethics committee to come to any kind of agreement. Some may look to the committee to reach consensus by reflecting the 'common morality', but that is an illusion; there is *no* common morality. Even if there were, 'we need to be clear about the weight we give to community beliefs and attitudes', for even majority beliefs and attitudes do not prove that a certain practice is morally right or morally wrong.

In rejecting the notion of a common morality, Charlesworth is very much at loggerheads with legal moralists such as Devlin.

Devlin believes that society is a community of ideas that has a certain moral foundation. To determine what the community considers to be immoral is, he feels, not particularly problematic. 'Immorality then, for the purpose of the law is what every right-minded person is presumed to consider to be immoral.' Who might this right-minded person be? Devlin has a ready answer for this question too. It is the 'the man in the Clapham omnibus', 'the man in the jury box' (Devlin 1965, p.15). Others, of course, find these assertions of Devlin teeming with problems of their own. 'Devlin's community of ideas does not exist', writes Leiser (1979, p.27), 'and it is doubtful that it would be a good thing for it to exist if it could be brought about.'

If we cannot refer to a common morality, are decisions on ethical issues to be left to philosophers? Charlesworth discusses this question, emphasising the complexity and ambiguity of ethical decision making even for professional ethicists. Moreover, he is opposed to elitism and shows a reluctance to give professional ethicists any kind of monopoly here. Non-professionals, he believes, have the basic skills needed for moral interpretation, for these are none other than the human skills of reflection and imagination. What all this leads to, in Charlesworth's view, is 'a demystified, or deflated, view of bioethics (and of bioethics committees and experts)' (1989, p.116).

Charlesworth is attempting to do what he has found some committee members unwilling to do, i.e. to press liberal values to their logical conclusions. Let us do the same. If we accept the sharp disjunction between law and morality which Charlesworth's liberalism demands, what does this mean for the role of ethics committees *vis-à-vis* the law and the role they have *vis-à-vis* morality? Committees may have to deal with both but they must surely deal with each of them differently. At the very least, they cannot address legal issues and moral issues as if law and morality were synonymous or co-extensive.

We can start with the legal aspect of the committee's task. The committee Charlesworth is primarily concerned with in his Boyer Lectures is the expert body set up to 'make recommendations to government and policymakers' (1989, p.97). Anyone who joins such a body 'chooses to take part in a committee that is concerned with practical outcomes with a quasi-political aspect' (1989, p.111). Charlesworth more than once cites Dame Mary Warnock. Warnock headed a British committee of inquiry into human embryology, which came to be known as the Warnock Committee. Its report was published in 1984. Warnock is in no doubt about the brief given to the committee bearing her name:

> But, of course, we were not set up simply to utter moral pronouncements, agreed or otherwise. We were supposed to advise Ministers with a view to future legislation. (Warnock 1985, p.x)

This legal side of the task of bioethics committees is reasonably straightforward - in principle, if not in practice. The Government's right to legislate to control research or practice in areas such as technologically assisted fertility, surrogacy or genetic engineering is unassailable. These procedures have dramatic consequences for human beings and human society. To the extent that public order or the protection of accepted human rights requires it, the State can and should intervene by way of legislation. The role of the committees is to advise the State on the necessity of such intervention and the most appropriate forms it might take.

If we restrict our considerations to this role of expert bodies, the title 'bioethics committees' appears to be a misnomer. The advice these committees offer in fulfilment of this role does not relate to morality or immorality of behaviours. The grounds on which their advice rests are not moral grounds but, in Charlesworth's terms, are 'practical' and 'quasi-political'. In giving advice, they are not concerned with, or for, the moral health of individuals. In this respect, they are not ethics committees at all. Rather, they are advisory bodies on legislation, for the judgments they make have to do with proposed laws in the area of biotechnology, not with bioethics, i.e. moral norms that individuals feel bound by, or fail to feel bound by, in the depths of personal conscience. In advising Government on legislation, committees are not making an authoritative statement on the morality or immorality of the behaviour to which the legislation refers. In fact, as we have noted already, ethics committees are not, and never can be, in a position to make an authoritative statement on morality or immorality of any kind.

Charlesworth does not restrict his comments to bodies set up by Government to advise it on legislation. He refers, for example, to guidelines from the Medical Research Ethics Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council (1989, p.99). This directs our attention to the kind of ethics committee with which researchers are more likely to be directly concerned. These committees issue directives in their own name or, in the case of local or institutional ethics committees, administer directives issued by the sponsoring body.

There is no doubt that guidance from such sources and at such levels is needed. It cannot be left to Government. Government legislation largely has to do with what can be classified as 'crimes' and cannot cover the kinds of situations researchers tend to be involved with. However, ethics committees of this type face the same dilemma that governments face - that of needing to limit human liberty for the sake of human liberty - and bear the same burden that governments bear - that of having to justify the restrictions they impose. 'The conflict between liberty and law, and between liberty and morals, goes beyond the criminal law', Leiser tells us . 'It extends into many other areas of our personal and communal lives and affects us in ways that go beyond the reach of the criminal law' (1979, p.5). Leiser could well have added the realm of research to the areas of business and medical practice which he cites as examples here. Ethics committees, like a government, must justify whatever restrictions they place on human freedom. And ethics committees, like a government, cannot proscribe behaviour simply on the grounds that it is unethical.

It may need to be re-emphasised that, to accept such propositions, it is not necessary to believe that legal positivism is 'established' or 'valid' or 'true' (or that anything can be 'established' or 'valid' or 'true'). It is only necessary to establish that the position is *tenable*. If it is tenable, the very values of the liberal society we profess to be require us to allow people to adhere to it.

Researchers are not being allowed this when ethics committees issue ethical norms *qua* ethical norms and brand contrary behaviour not merely with the label of 'non-compliant' or 'recalcitrant' or 'dissident' but with the stigma of 'unethical' or 'immoral'. Such committees are acting *ultra vires* and, for that reason, are themselves open to the charge of acting unethically.

Role implications

Picture for a moment an ethics committee that has adopted the line of thought being discussed here. That is to say, it has ceased to see itself as issuing ethical directives or ruling authoritatively on ethical responsibilities in what we have seen to be the primary sense of *ethical*. It is simply a body that requires researchers to behave in a fashion accepted as proper for the research community.

This is a very different ethics committee. For a start, the committee now feels obliged to justify the restrictions it places on researchers' activities. In the past it labelled actions 'unethical' and left it at that. 'It is unethical to carry out covert forms of research...' The very word *unethical* seemed to end all discussion. It brought to its statements an aura of sacrosanctity. It made them 'unquestionable'. Who, after all, can argue against ethical demands? Who can defend what is immoral? The assertions of the committee appeared to go without saying. Now things are different. When a committee proscribes behaviours not on the ground that they are unethical but because the committee believes they are not proper or acceptable forms of behaviour for a researcher, its claims very obviously do not go without saying. In the face of such claims, 'Why is this the case?' is a legitimate, and probably inevitable, question.

To justify its rulings and have them accepted requires, the committee finds, very close liaison and dialogue with the research community it is meant to serve. The committee experiences an urgent need to devise effective means for client consultation and client participation in its decision making. It can no longer be content merely to meet periodically in isolation and pass its judgments on the basis of its own collective wisdom and expertise.

Having to justify its directives and attempting to involve researchers on a broad scale in its deliberations is a new experience for the committee. Yet the changes that have overtaken it go deeper still, for they not only affect what the committee now has to do but raise the question of what the committee now *is*. An identity crisis, no less. The committee finds itself asking in what sense it can still be regarded as an *ethics* committee.

Perhaps it should change its name? Not necessarily, it concludes, for it is able to justify its title in other ways. Issuing guidelines for conduct is not the only role a research ethics committee can play and it need not deny itself the right and responsibility to address genuinely moral issues in other ways.

Nothing in this paper should be taken to diminish the importance of ethics in research activities. In fact, the rejection of legal moralism gives it added emphasis by placing responsibility for ethical conduct where it needs to be placed.

This is a point made very clearly by the Wolfenden Committee. In asserting that the realm of private morality and immorality is not the law's business, the Committee hastens to add:

> To say this is not to condone or encourage private immorality. On the contrary, to emphasize the personal and private nature of moral or immoral conduct is to emphasize the personal and private responsibility of the individual for his own actions, and that is a responsibility which a mature agent can properly be

> expected to carry for himself without the threat of punishment from the law. (1965, §61, p.48)

A mature researcher too can properly be expected to assume ethical responsibility for her or his actions. Making moral rules does not necessarily help the researcher to do that. As Henri Bergson's famous distinction between open and closed morality makes clear, acting morally and conforming to moral rules are by no means the same thing. Many ethicists would want to say that, far from fostering morality, a proliferation of moral rules tends to detract from it by blurring the need, and limiting the scope, for authentic personal response to moral values.

So the importance of an ethical stance in all forms of research is in no way in question. Quite clearly, it is of paramount importance that researchers be imbued at all times with a deep and enlightened sense of responsibility for what they do and for the consequences of what they do. What our reborn ethics committee comes to see is that it is well placed to encourage this sense of responsibility in researchers and to develop and refine it. With this end in view, it begins to sponsor education programs for researchers. These are programs designed to help researchers to discuss ethical values, identify ethical problems and address ethical issues, all the time recognising the complexity and ambiguity of ethical decision making and respecting the diversity of moral standpoints and moral theory.

There is, of course, diversity of this kind within the ranks of the committee itself. However, as it begins to shape and conduct its education programs, the committee finds that diversity no longer a liability. To the contrary, it proves both authenticating and enriching - authenticating because it is a faithful reflection of the pluralism found within the research community and in society as a whole, and enriching because it enables and powers a dialogue in which different emphases and stances can engage with one another to promote understanding, develop new insights and offer fresh challenges.

What is beginning to emerge is the picture of a new kind of ethics committee. Coming into view for us is an ethics committee which demands considerable energy and time on the part of its members, utilises particular forms of expertise, and cannot function without the commitment of substantial resources. Such a committee cannot operate on the 'volunteer' model which, by and large, is the norm at the present time, at least within educational institutions. It would be, all the same, an ethics committee that reaches far beyond the negative role of precluding pitfalls and avoiding undesirable consequences. It would be an ethics committee that makes a highly constructive contribution to research efforts and research achievements.

We may be led to this model by a desire to escape the illiberalism inherent in the workings of what we have at the moment - reward enough, to be sure - but the 'new' ethics committee promises far, far more.

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The contribution of Dr Rudolf Steiner to adult education: An Australian perspective.

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An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 6th International Conference on the History of Adult Education, Jena., Germany, September 1996

Introduction

In presenting this topic, I am conscious of a slight irony in coming all the way from Australia to talk about the work of a modern philosopher whose major work was done in this country. However, I hope to reinforce by this very fact the realisation that the work which was begun by Rudolf Steiner in Germany in the first decades of this century has not only been taken up and developed throughout Europe, but has also spread to the southern hemisphere, and in the last decade of this century we can say that there are significant numbers of people in countries like Brazil, South Africa and Australia who are being influenced in their personal and professional lives by the many and varied ideas of this individual.

This paper gives some background to the life and work of Steiner, concentrating in particular on the approach to education which he developed. The paper then discusses the importance of this approach to the field of adult education by describing research in progress which aims to map the learning journeys of adults involved in Steiner education. Finally, a picture will emerge of the links between Steiner education and developments in adult education in Australia.

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)

Rudolf Steiner was born in February 1861 in that part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which is modern-day Croatia, to a German-speaking middle-class family. In childhood he showed an astounding precocity, teaching himself geometry at the age of eight and absorbing the fundamentals of philosophy, trigonometry, analytical geometry, calculus, Latin, Greek and geography by the age of 15. This ability for self-directed learning would be a distinguishing feature throughout his entire life.

Formal education consisted of the Realschule, the Vienna Technische Hochschule where Steiner took a degree in physics, chemistry and mathematics while simultaneously attending lectures in literature and philosophy at the University of Vienna, and a PhD from the University of Rostock.

In addition to this polymathic interest in scientific and philosophical knowledge, Steiner also 'complained' of being clairvoyant from early childhood, and by his early twenties had begun to develop his own philosophy of *spiritual science,* based on a thorough empirical understanding and experience of both the scientific and the spiritual worlds. His theories were also influenced by the scientific writings of Goethe, which Steiner had been appointed to edit for Kurschner's edition of German National Literature at Weimar in 1883.

The first of countless publications on a variety of topics now appeared - *Truth and Knowledge, The Philosophy of Freedom, Goethe's Conception of the World* - texts which were to form the basis of Steiner's later influential work in education, medicine, agriculture and social science.

In 1898 Steiner moved to Berlin where he became editor of the *Review of Literature* and began his career as an adult educator at the Berlin Workers Educational Institute. After being invited to be guest speaker for 7000 members of the German Printers Union at the Gutenberg 500th Anniversary Festival, Steiner went on to conduct hundreds of public and private lectures on a diverse range of topics all over Europe. A large number of these lectures were recorded and published, and are still in print.

The intellectual climate in Europe at the turn of the century seemed to be heavily influenced by esoteric thought and metaphysical ideas - an emerging stream of consciousness which attracted many people who were looking for more than established religious dogma and rationalist materialistic values could offer. A contemporary of Steiner's was H. P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, which Steiner was briefly associated with until their views diverged.

Steiner went on to establish a centre for the study of music, drama, art and sciences in Dornach, Switzerland, where he moved in 1913 to construct the Goetheanum, a building designed and constructed in accordance with his unique indications on form and space. This was essentially a centre for adult education. While continuing to provide travelling lecture courses, Steiner began to advocate what he called the Three-fold Social Order, in part responding to post-war needs for social reconstruction and as a practical manifestation of his esoteric philosophy, which he named Anthroposophy (literally, the 'Wisdom of Man'). This found realisation in major new movements in education, the arts, medicine and agriculture, which are further outlined below. However, this activity and its focus on the three areas of Freedom, Security and Equality earned Steiner many enemies and in 1922 the Goetheanum was destroyed in an arson attack.

Steiner's response was to form the General Anthroposophical Society and begin work on a second Goetheanum. However, he died in 1925 before it was finished. His death is shrouded in some mystery and, although unsubstantiated, has been attributed to the dark forces that were massed against him and his radical ideas, as by this time he had attracted a large and influential following in Western Europe. Even today, Steiner is regarded by many as a crackpot and the initiator of a dangerous and mysterious cult. For example, I recently came across a text on the philosophy of education which dismissed Steiner as a 'pretentious mystagogue' and in fact renounced all philosophers whose work was not based on empirical positivism (O'Connor 1963).

Waldorf schools

Apart from the Anthroposophical movement itself, the legacy for which Steiner is most remembered is the approach to schooling of children which had its origins in 1919 when he was approached by representatives of German industry who were concerned about education for the children of their workers. The first school for Rudolf Steiner Education began in the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart for employees of that company, but children soon came flocking to the school from all over Europe and it was not long before similar schools were established in other countries. From these beginnings, the term 'Waldorf' school has passed into common usage; at the present time there are over 600 Waldorf or Steiner schools worldwide, in over 40 countries. It has been regarded as 'the fastest growing independent school movement in the world' (UNE 1996). In Australia, there are now about 40 Steiner schools established, most of them primary schools, with a number having a full primary and secondary curriculum based entirely on Steiner's indications.

The schools share a common philosophical foundation which encompasses education of the whole being - spirit, soul and body - and outlines in depth the stages of human development from birth through life in seven-year cycles - from ages 1 -7, 8 - 14, 15 - 21, and so on. The belief that education is an art and that educating the whole child means addressing the forces of their mind, heart and will are the principles which Steiner established in 1919 and are still vibrant and alive today. The question then arises: Why has this unique approach to education continued to flourish and spread to all corners of the globe? In particular, the question I have asked in my research is: What relevance does Steiner education have to Australia in the 1990s, why are people attracted to it, and what are the implications for adult education?

The answer has much to do with the fact that the schools require the support of the community (children, teachers, families and the broader society in the area) in order to function financially, physically, socially and spiritually, and that the responsibility for the children's (and the school's) development is shared by all. This level of involvement in the process of education becomes not only a deeper experience for the children but an adult learning experience for the parents and teachers, as a commitment to Waldorf education means a subtle shift in lifestyle and values that is at once challenging and rewarding as it involves a certain amount of inner work and spiritual development.

For teachers, a seven-year commitment of responsibility for teaching a group of children from Class 1 through to Class 7 requires strength and determination, yet also presents the opportunity for learning from and growing with the children as they mature into adolescents.

For parents, the commitment is also there in terms of choosing to pay for independent education for their children; yet the opportunity to contribute to the building of one's child's classroom, develop the school's gardens, manage the school's affairs or just attend the seasonal festivals can be enlightening in itself in comparison to the relative disempowerment experienced in state education systems. While this involvement may also occur for parents whose children attend other small independent or private schools, I suggest that the experience for parents can be deeper and more significant in Steiner schools, which are not based on religious or denominational assumptions but are underpinned by a particular philosophy - that of spiritual science. There is diversity even in the Catholic school system, and it may be that people are nowadays looking for a coherent philosophy, especially when they have the experience of becoming a parent.

The need to undertake meaningful work within the school is a more effective way for adults to experience the new social forms outlined by Steiner than as a set of abstract notions taken on authority, although study groups, lectures and workshops on related subjects are also offered by and for parents and teachers. Therefore, the schools function in a much broader sense than just pedagogical institutions, which links with Steiner's ideas about the continuing human development that takes place after the awakening of the ego at about the age of 21, and that educational practices must be rooted in an appreciation of the feeling, willing, imagining and thinking faculties. Human development consists in both acquisition and loss of abilities, and each stage of development presents a characteristic faculty for educating and training. Work in acknowledging and learning from these continuing phases in adult life has been continued by writers such as B. C. Lievegoed and Coen van Houten, and by such centres as Emerson College in Sussex, England, and the Goetheanum in Switzerland.

Waldorf schools are also known as 'free schools'. This does not refer to 'free' in a pedagogical sense, as in A. S. Neill's original conception for Summerhill, where children were free to decide whether they wanted to learn anything. (Incidentally, that school has now moved to a more traditional model since the unique personality of its founder is no longer there.) In contrast to this notion of 'free', the Waldorf curriculum is actually highly structured and based firmly on those stages of human development and seven-year life cycles mentioned earlier. (As an aside, we suspect in Australia that much of the rigid structure adopted by Waldorf schools is actually based on Germanic traditions and not necessarily synonymous with Waldorf).

The General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in Australia, Karl Kaltenbach, observed in a recent lecture that Waldorf free schools are named so because they are non-religious, non-denominational and non-political; and went on to suggest that this is perhaps another reason why they are found around the world - because it is theoretically possible for them to embrace all persuasions and cultural backgrounds, even perhaps in Buddhist or Muslim contexts. He noted that, while there is a 'Christ impulse' which underpins Anthroposophy - that of appreciating the other person - it is a sort of 'global Christianity' that is beyond denominationalism.

For each cultural and geographical context in which a Waldorf school is situated, the local conditions and values can be incorporated, e.g. some of the Jewish festivals which are celebrated in certain schools in the United States. In Australian schools we observe the four seasonal festivals around the time of the solstices and equinoxes. The winter festival is a very special occasion as it is celebrated mid-year in our southern winter when the days are short and the nights long and cold and the candle flame symbolises the spark of life to be kept alight in the darkness of midwinter. However, this does not coincide with the esoteric basis of the Christmas quality of the birth of light in the darkness as, of course, Christmas occurs in our summer when it is usually very hot. Similarly, Easter occurs in our autumn which seasonally does not have the quality of resurrection. So there is tension in the Australian Waldorf movement between those who would base their school's curriculum specifically on the indications of Steiner in a European context and those who would Australianise the curriculum based on the view Steiner also held that the schools should reflect their situation and the personalities of the teachers and community.

How does this relate to adult education? Well, the stages of a school's development can also be linked to the stages of an individual's development. Last year I visited 11 Steiner schools around Australia and was struck by the ones that were newly established - typically on the perimeter of a town or city, in semi-rural country, with two or maybe three buildings, built in the visually unique architectural style using organic forms, with a small number of children and a dedicated band of parents and teachers working to see it progress and develop. I also visited other schools more like the one that my children attend - well established and with a full 12-year program and several hundred students; but I was made to realise how our school had once been like the raw new ones. Now that it is a relatively large institution it can no longer be managed by a small group of parents and teachers who can meet around someone's kitchen table. It is in a more mature stage of development, which brings with it new issues and problems which must be grappled with by the school community. The adults grow with the school as the children do. And, as with human development, each stage presents a characteristic faculty for educating and training.

While the Waldorf School movement continues to grow, there is a concomitant shortage of suitably trained teachers. The schools themselves provide training grounds for potential teachers and some have formal programs in place with classes presented by experienced teachers.

There is also a Steiner-based adult training centre in Sydney (Parsifal College) which offers an accredited two-year Associate Diploma in Steiner Education. The University of New England in New South Wales is the only university in Australia and one of the few in the world that offers courses in Steiner education at tertiary level, so it will now be possible to complete a Bachelor of Education in Steiner Education which satisfies state teacher registration requirements. However, the founder of a formal teacher training program which is based on an apprenticeship system within the Lorien Novalis School in Sydney, Alan Whitehead, has a firm view that 'the teacher whom the school prepares itself; whose roots are in the community's own rich regional soil, is - all other things being equal - the best teacher for that particular school. She or he will have a deeper understanding of the community to be served; will probably have greater commitment ... the teacher being already on home ground.' (Whitehead, 1995, p.6) There is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that teachers trained in this way very often come from the parent body.

One example of this in our school is the parent who started by helping to maintain the school garden on a voluntary basis, then began to take groups of children who would help with the work and also learn by propagating plants and growing their own vegetables, until now she is a full-time member of staff in charge of a bio-Dynamic garden which is incorporated into the school curriculum and attracts people from the wider community who are also interested in learning about this approach to horticulture. Thus, the school - that is, the children, the parents and the community - are literally involved in constructing the whole environment and this sort of multi-disciplinary, community-based approach can suggest a model for adult education with possible application in other settings.

Research in progress

The title of the research project being undertaken by this writer towards a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of New England is *Adult Learning Journeys and Life Experiences in Rudolf Steiner Education in Australia.*

The research focus is conceptual in nature as it explores 'the interaction or juxtaposition of two or more factors' (Guba 1978, in Merriam 1988, p.41). The two conceptual areas are (1) Steiner education and (2) adult learning theory associated with informal, transformative and lifelong learning. Both areas are well served in the literature. However, a formal acknowledgment of the influence of Steiner education on the education of adults is not so apparent in the literature, and is perceived as being an area worth pursuing.

The interest in this research arises out of my own involvement and subjective experience as a parent whose children attend a Waldorf school, and as an adult educator engaged in facilitating adult learning in the context of a University Faculty of Education.

As someone engaged in an experiential learning process who has access to the language, concepts and models with which to engage in meta-learning - that is reflection on learning and attempting to make sense and meaning out of the process - I am in a position to seek out the stories of other people in Waldorf school communities who may be sharing similar experiences.

The preferred methodology for achieving this is the study circle - a recognised process in adult education not only for sharing information, facilitating learning, and building community, but for empowering individuals and contributing positively towards social development. Study groups have always been a traditional method for those parents and interested parties engaging in an exploration of Anthroposophy or searching for knowledge as a result of becoming involved in Steiner education. The method is also preferred for this research in progress as it acknowledges that the *process* is just as important as the *product* when adults engage in reflecting on learning.

The methodology that is emerging is therefore based on a reflexive approach, in the post-modern sense, as my own voice and perspective is acknowledged as being at the centre of the research focus. In a recent paper in the ***International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education***, entitled 'Adopting a postmodern approach to research', Angela Packwood and Pat Sykes assert that research, especially in education, has been based on the perspectives of the Other - the informant or respondent, the one being 'researched'; with the consequence that 'the biography of the researcher and the influence this has on the text tends to have been neglected' (Packwood and Sykes 1996, p.341).

That phrase 'the biography of the researcher' is interesting in the context of this international conference. We need to acknowledge, as we explore the biographies of personalities in adult education, that we are also personalities in adult education, and our perspectives, our views, our voices, will shape and distort the picture that is presented. Our biographies, in fact, contribute to a construction of history that we accept as reality. For example, the brief outline of the contribution of Dr Rudolf Steiner to the field of adult education which I have just given is not only an Australian perspective; it is my perspective and arises from my own biography and narrative.

Similarly, the outcome of the research process of attempting to define the links between Steiner education and adult education may just be my story of other people's stories.

Conclusion

In addition to the world-wide Waldorf school movement, Rudolf Steiner also introduced the art of Eurythmy, a method of movement or 'visible speech and music' that is taught in Waldorf schools; a method of organic agriculture using bio-Dynamic soil preparations and celestial indications; Anthroposophical medicine based on homoeopathic preparations, rhythmic massage and an understanding of the four human temperaments (choleric, melancholic, sanguine, and phlegmatic); the Christian Communities; and the worldwide Camphill Communities for adults and children needing special care.

These practical and applied aspects of Anthroposophy can all be regarded as contributing to the field of adult education, as they engage individuals and communities in developing spiritual, aesthetic and cultural freedom and material, social and economic security and in striving for justice and equality. As they all directly arise from the influence of Rudolf Steiner, it is truly fitting that he be acknowledged as a significant personality in the international field of adult education.

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Part Two

Approaches to interpretation

Chapter 7

A multi-storied approach to the analysis and interpretation of interview transcript data

Audrey Grant

Preamble

How we analyse and interpret interview transcripts, indeed any texts, reveals the personal and social stances we take up in relation to learning and to life, our underlying assumptions, presuppositions and the wider social discourses to which they belong. This paper arises to some extent out of my own dissatisfaction as a researcher with prevailing approaches to the analysis and interpretation of interview data, and with the limitations of particular perspectives and presuppositions.

Three kinds of limitations in research approaches which I think need to be addressed concern the relation and disjunctions set up between single and multiple perspectives, micro and macro range of focus, and personal and social dimensions and values. For example, a single viewpoint, a one-dimensional line of inquiry may be pursued, when instead multiple perspectives and multi-dimensional approaches are called for. Yet the multiple alternatives may be offered as if pluralism is all that matters and relativism is the only truth position available; and hence the pitfall of the relativist fallacy looms large. Or, a macro perspective is developed without sensitivity to evidence at the micro level, or *vice-versa*. Micro-analysis - as in linguistics, for example - may stop short of any social theory or critical cutting edge, while macro-sociological analysis offers pertinent critique but skews its textual evidence by selecting illustrations to support theory without grounding them in a sound research base. Or personal and social dimensions are polarised as if an either/or is the only possibility - another version of the debate over the subjective/objective dichotomy, which I would argue is best laid to rest not by attempts at subtraction but by addition, combining the two stances, on and experiences of, inner and outer realities. The research biases which result from the limitations mentioned are often predictable: the bias of individualistic, humanistic approaches towards prioritising the micro picture, and the bias of critical social theory towards developing the macro picture. Either approach will be limited if it takes a single focus or perspective and leaves its own ideological presuppositions and discourses implicit and not amenable to question by the modes of analysis adopted.

This tendency for theorists, researchers or practitioners to polarise by adopting one 'positionality' or perspective to the near exclusion of another is evident in any field, including the fields of adult education, language and literacy, in which I work. In qualitative research methodology and pedagogy in adult education two such tendencies are apparent. The earlier tendency has been to privilege personal and individual ways of knowing, by focusing on individual response in such a way as to invite the criticism of being individualistic, psychologistic, naturalistic, asocial and so on. A later tendency, developing partly as a critique of the first, is to foreground the social and ideological to such an extent that human agency and choice are all but excluded. Either way, a single perspective, once adopted, is likely to preclude rather than to complement alternative possibilities so that, even if the old dichotomies of quantitative vs qualitative research or process vs product approaches are laid to rest, other dichotomies are evoked. Thus, critical social theorists dismiss humanistic, progressive or person-centred approaches, attacking their focus on individual constructions of meaning, and replacing them with razor-sharp critiques and post-structuralist readings. While it is important that these critical readings problematise the taken-for-granted, it is also unfortunate if, in so doing, they are replacing one set of silences and gaps with another set.

I am thinking of cases where a deconstructive, analytical approach exposes the socially constructed nature of meanings and practices, but in an anti-modernist way that also implies a loss of concern about persons, an indifference, agnosticism or intolerance about the personal, about sociocognitive processes, intentions, inwardness, meaning making, and so on. The result is a loss or a 'liquidation of the self', to use Macintyre's (1984) phrase. A current claim that the post-modern is being superseded by the post-human (1996) may well herald an ominous consequence of such implications, and yet another barren pursuit. Burbules and Rice's (1991) and Kegan's (1994) discussions of the distinction between post-modernism in an anti-modernist form and post-modernism in a reconstructive form are pertinent here and will be referred to later in this paper.

Nor is satisfactory resolution afforded by the adoption of an alternative, compromise position midway between two such extremes as these polarised person-centred and critical social stances. Prime examples are the prescriptive agendas of market reform, competency-based training, and functional approaches to the role of language and literacy in national development and economic productivity, which render both the personal and the social subservient to the economic. For pragmatic and functional orientations carry no guarantees of any commitment to attend to personal constructions, meanings and beliefs, or to recognise the social (see Thatcher's claim that there is no such thing as society), or to value a questioning of the *status quo* through social analysis and critique. A potential weakness with any one position, but especially with such midway positions, is that assumptions on which a particular analytical approach is premised are not spelt out, argued or open to inquiry. Recent systems level policy, curriculum, quality assurance and assessment documents might serve as examples of textual evidence to cite in support of this claim. Typically, time and other constraints imposed on their production preclude genuine consultation, furthering the tendency to deal with issues uncritically, at a taken-for-granted level of 'appropriate' or 'good practice' and 'policy implementation', and shortcircuiting debate about interpretive and theoretical frameworks. Thus, possibilities for critical reflection, asking the 'why questions' or problematising are ruled out.

Overview

This paper attempts to address and overcome the kinds of limitations in research analysis identified above by developing a multi-storied approach to the interpretive explanation of texts - particularly of open-ended interview and transcript data. To this end the paper proposes three broad interdisciplinary perspectives as analogies or frames of intelligibility. Further, each of these broad modes of storying and world making is presented as multi-dimensional, with three interpenetrating layers or levels of storying, which more or less correspond to the personal, social and culturally contested (ideological and political) dimensions of life, interpretation and explanation. The attempt is to attend to these dimensions more evenly or equally than is usually the case, and in so doing to juxtapose the *micro through to macro* dimensions of life and discursive practice, and finally to overlay the three broad perspectives.

The general orientation of this paper is that of *interpretive explanation*, the form of explanation in social science research which, according to Geertz (1983, p.22),

> ...trains its attention on what institutions, actions, images, utterances, events, customs ... mean to those whose institutions, actions, customs and so on they are. As a result it issues ... in constructions ... systematic unpackings of the conceptual world in which ... (people) live.
>
> The manner of these constructions itself varies ... But they all represent attempts to formulate how this people or that, this period or that, this person or that makes sense itself and, understanding that, what we understand by social order, historical change, or psychic functioning in general. Inquiry is directed towards cases or sets of cases, and toward the particular features that mark them off; but its (far-reaching) aims are ... to distinguish the materials of human experience.

Overall, the three 'moves' this paper suggests towards these ends of interpretive explanation, involve an overlaying of three different ways of conceptualising and viewing the 'field'. Each of these proposed perspectives advances its theory and analysis 'mainly by analogy, a "seeing as" comprehension of the less intelligible by the more' (Geertz 1983, p.22). The analogies vary, as do the traditions of thought they draw upon. The three different analogies are: life as narrative, literacy as social practices, and language as textual discourse. In summary, the three frameworks or analogies are proposed:

- a narrative perspective on life - life as narrative, persons as storytellers, and the interpretive readings of personal, social and cultural narratives and identities;
- a critical social perspective on literacy - literacy as critical social practice and the critical analysis of what counts as literacy and as versions of the literate subject;
- a social discourse perspective on language - language as social practice and discourse - discourses and discourse analysis.

The first move develops a narrative approach, beyond the usual person-centred focus and descriptive analysis, to encompass as well the socially diverse and the culturally contested and dominant narratives. The second move takes a theoretical perspective on literacy as critical social practice, and follows through the related micro and personal implications, thereby preserving an understanding of literacy-related events, acts and identities, as well as of social processes and practices and of critical cultural and ideological dimensions. The third move adds a third framework, that of language as social discourse, so that the interrelationships might be spanned between a micro focus on textual practices characteristic of much linguistic analysis, a mid-range focus as in studies of discursive practices and types, and the macro focus on dominant social discourses, contested ideologies, competing and changing worldviews.

In these ways I am proposing that, within and across each of these three broad analytical approaches, it is possible to foreground and acknowledge the personal/social/cultural storying or the micro-through-to-macro dimensions in the constructions of meaning. As is also emphasised diagrammatically by the three boxes in each of *Figures 1, 2 and 3, it is crucial, for the* purposes of sound analysis and interpretation, that the three dimensions are understood relationally - in connection with, and as contextually part of each other. My contention is twofold here: that it is important to give each dimension due attention and that doing so necessitates recognition of their essential interdependence. As I have already suggested, this is important to redress areas of common oversight in the perspectives adopted for research practice. For whichever single dimension we focus upon remains one-dimensional unless we can also hold in mind, and in tension, the co-existence and interaction of the other two planes or frames. If this is so, then deconstructive, postmodernist readings concerned only with applying critical theory at the broad level of ideology and hegemony may themselves be operating as one-dimensional.

In the following discussion of the three perspectives I will attempt to suggest briefly the potential application of these interdisciplinary contributions to the analysis and interpretation of interview-based research data.

A. A narrative perspective on life

The application of a narrative perspective in research seems to have lost some appeal because critics perceive it to be flawed by unproblematic preoccupation with personal, expressive narratives and descriptive analysis, as for instance in the telling of a 'real[illegible]le' (Lather 1991). My contention is that these flaws are not inherent in a narrative perspective *per se*, and can be overcome by the development of a three-dimensional approach. Furthermore, developing the narrative analogy safeguards two related strengths, which the other two perspectives proposed (on literacy and discursive practices as social practices) have less potential to preserve, namely, the strengths of valuing and preserving an understanding of persons, and the aptness of the analogy or metaphor to understanding meaning-making processes and acts of mind. Hence, considerable attention is given to these understandings in the development of the first perspective.

Interpretive beings: 'Connecting action to its sense'

Cognitive, constructivist and post-structuralist theories and recent philosophical traditions of thought in the social sciences take as fundamental the proposition that human beings are interpretive beings, inescapably involved in making sense of their experiences, in connecting human actions to their meanings, to what they signify. The acts and processes by which we construe, reconstrue, and are constructed by, our own and others' constructions of life and possible worlds are *interpretive* through and through. For instance, for the interpretive anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), this is the epitome of the ethnographer's task: 'doing thick description', constructing readings, fashioning interpretations, of the 'transcient actions' of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. Ethnography entails constructing 'thick descriptions' of human action by connecting actions with what they signify for the 'actors' or participants, their social import, and their cultural sense. The allied metaphor is that of narrative - of human beings as storytellers, life as story and story as life, a narrative perspective on life.

Geertz claims that the move to a narrative perspective constitutes a 'sea change' in the social sciences, above all because explanation comes to be regarded 'as a matter of connecting action to its sense, rather than behaviour to its determinants'.

> This refiguration of social theory represents ... a sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of what we want to know. (Geertz 1983, p.34)

White (1995) elaborates the importance of this massive shift and contrasts the thought underlying the old and new positions and the far-reaching political implications. *Connecting behaviour to its determinants* has been associated with behaviourism, static notions of knowledge, and mechanistic metaphors of 'system' and 'pattern', and asocial, 'autonomous' perspectives. *Connecting action to its sense* is the primary contribution and focus of the narrative perspective and metaphor.

Many contributions in diverse and interdisciplinary fields can be cited as evidence of the 'sea change' taking place with the development of a narrative perspective as an organising metaphor. To select a few, these occur in the fields of ...

- cognitive and constructivist psychology as represented by the work of George Kelly (1955/1963), Phillida Salmon (1980, 1990, 1992) and Jerome Bruner (1986, 1988, 1990)

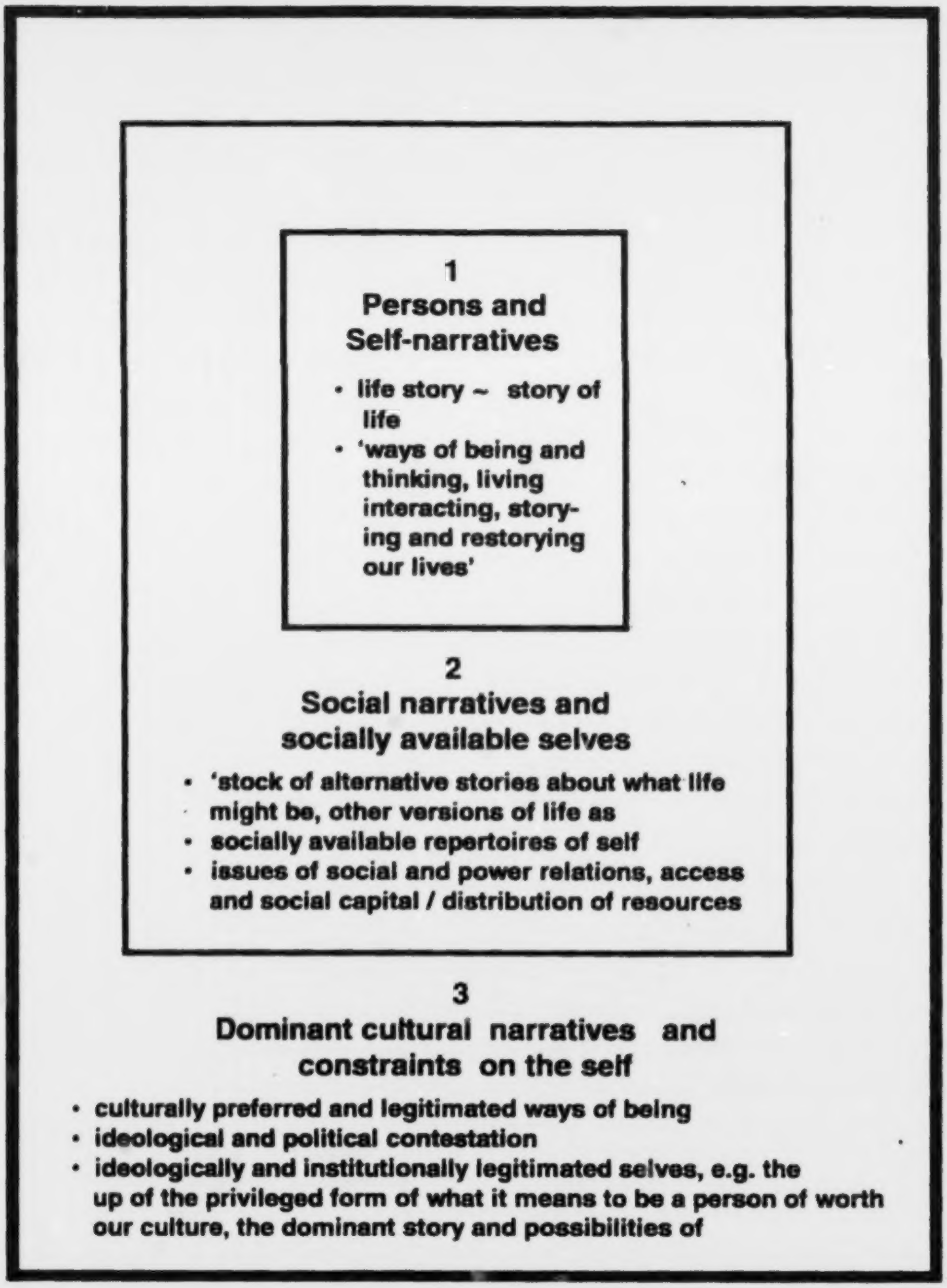
- literary criticism (Denys Harding 1974 and Barbara Hardy 1968/1987)
- interpretive anthropology, and ethnography (Geertz 1971, 1983; Heath 1982, 1983), and qualitative research (Peter Reason 1981; Cortazzi 1993)
- family therapy (David Epston and Michael White 1989; Michael White 1995).

White perceives our 'lives as constituted through narrative'. Asked what he means by 'story or narrative as life', White states:

> This is to propose that human beings are interpreting beings - that we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives. It's to propose that it's not possible for us to interpret our experience without access to some frame of intelligibility, one that provides a context for our experience, one that makes the attribution of meaning possible. It is to propose that stories constitute this frame of intelligibility. (1995, p.13)

Figure 2 represents the first framework proposed for analysis purposes. This perspective develops the analogy or metaphor of life-as-narrative - story-as-life - extending it from personal self-narratives, and local forms of 'storying' to take up broader, socially available and culturally contested narratives, and using it to foreground concepts of identity and personhood. The descriptors 'personal', 'social', and 'cultural' attached to 'narratives' are proposed to distinguish three dimensions or interpenetrating layers of interpretation which, although simultaneously interacting, are difficult to focus on at one and the same time.

In other words, we can think of the connecting and interconnecting of 'action to its sense' as taking place simultaneously through the interpenetration of three dimensional planes, spheres or layers. At the centre is the dimension of the personal and individual, of personally constructed self-narratives, interacting and in dynamic tension with the social 'surround' of socially available narratives - alternative stories to which individuals, through social networks and groups, may have or be denied access. And, more broadly, at the outer layer is the dimension of culturally preferred and institutionally legitimated narratives and ways of being indicative of cultural constraints on the self.



1
Persons and Self-narratives

- life story ~ story of life
- 'ways of being and thinking, living interacting, storying and restorying our lives'

2
Social narratives and socially available selves

- 'stock of alternative stories about what life might be, other versions of life as
- socially available repertoires of self
- issues of social and power relations, access and social capital / distribution of resources

3
Dominant cultural narratives and constraints on the self

- culturally preferred and legitimated ways of being
- ideological and political contestation
- ideologically and institutionally legitimated selves, e.g. the up of the privileged form of what it means to be a person of worth our culture, the dominant story and possibilities of

Figure 2
A narrative perspective and metaphor: Life as narrative and multistoried

The narrative perspective can serve to foreground, first, the storytelling, individual and sociocognitive processes of meaning making; second, the social processes and contexts of 'storying', including the diversity of socially available constructions and the multiplicity of stories; and third, the culturally competing, preferred, privileged or dominant stories of a society; and the histories of their conditions, contestations, the consequences of their production, and the possibilities for resistance.

The following account from White (1995) in effect spans the three layers or dimensions of narrative interpretation (see emphasis added) concerning persons, sociopolitical relations, and broad ideological contestations, which we will consider in turn below, in developing the first framework.

> And, when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense, we are introduced to the world of interpretation, and to the world of narrative ...
>
> When we break from the time-honoured notion of connecting behaviour to its determinants ... and when instead we begin to explore the connection of action to its sense or meaning, we turn our attention to processes of interpretation; **to how persons make sense of their experience**, to how they endow their experiences of life with meaning. And when this happens we find ourselves entering the territory of narrative, for when people are engaged in meaning making they are engaged in telling stories about their own and each other's lives:
>
> When we connect action to its sense ... we are encouraged to prioritise people's notions of what they are doing and why they are doing it, their views about how things came to be the way that they are ...
>
> When we connect action to its sense, we break from the received and unitary accounts of life, and in the process of this, **the politics of relationship are brought forth** ... The experiences of everyday life, the situations that provide the **context** ... the multiplicity of the interpretations ... the real effects of, or the consequences of these interpretations of experience ...
>
> ... in attending to these ... **we discern contestation as the condition of life** ... And when we discern contestation as the condition of life, the politics of inequality and marginalisation, of oppression and subjugation, of dominance and submission, of exploitation and resistance are foregrounded. (White 1995, pp.216-217. Emphasis added)

Similarly, as Figure 2 indicates, using the narrative perspective, we may foreground through the three dimensions the interactions between various understandings of the *human person, personhood* and *the self/selves*, from the micro to the macro - from the individual self/personal identities; the socially constructed selves, social identities or repertoires of selves; through to the culturally positioned privileged selves and the institutionally legitimated and sustained repertoires of 'selves'. Thus within the context of each narrative 'frame' and interactively across the frames we can trace how narratives and persons, versions of the self and identity are being conceptualised, constructed or positioned.

In the sections below I develop this dual concern with narrative and personhood in relation to each of the layers outlined in Figure 1.

Persons and self-narratives: Ways of being, thinking, living and interacting, storying and restorying our lives and identities

The inner layer attends to people as interpreting beings and to their processes of interpretation, "to how people make sense of their experience, to how they endow their experiences of life with meaning" (White, 1995). It is concerned with our ways of being, thinking, living and interacting, storying and restorying our lives and identities. Taking up the analogy of life-as-story it focuses on the narrative modes of personal experience which make up life histories, biographies and autobiographies.

• fashioning a life story/foregrounding the teller

Developing the metaphor - of people as storytellers, constructing and reconstructing meanings, storying and restorying, authoring and reauthoring their life narratives - is particularly apt for those who take a constructivist view of the human mind. The literary critic, Barbara Hardy (1968), wrote of narrative as "a primary act of mind transferred to art from life", of "the narrative structures of acts of mind", and of "the qualities that fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives". Jerome Bruner studied narrative and its 'world-making' function as a different form of thought from reasoning that is characteristic of logical argument.

> Philosophically speaking the view I shall take to narrative is a constructivist one - a view that takes as its central purpose that 'world making' is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts. (Bruner 1988, p.575)

Harold Rosen (1993: p. 149) in a paper entitled "We Are Our Stories" says:

> storytelling is an essential part of the functioning of the human mind. It is a major means of thinking and communicating our thoughts. ... Scholars of many different kinds ... have all insisted that narrative is not an optional extra - froth on the surface of human behaviour - but the 'central function or instance of the human mind' (Frederic Jamieson).

Narrative as a 'frame of intelligibility' for analysis can serve both to foreground the 'fashioning of a life story', and to *foreground the teller* - the person whose words, perspectives, experiences, ways of making and 'taking meaning' (Heath 1983), perceiving continuities and discontinuities over time, evaluating, relating, and so on, are conveyed through the interview.

This requires a researcher/observer to attend closely to what another person has said, to the wordings, as well as to the 'identity' of the speaker stylistically - to the '*who*', i.e. who is saying, seeing, constructing these meanings - stories and worlds - in these ways. Vital clues of how this person's meanings are being constructed, and what is being said, can be gleaned from close analysis of the recurrent images and metaphors, and from following through the vivid phrases and wordings, and tracing through recurrent themes.

- **prioritising personhood/valuing persons as personal and relational social beings**

To approach narrative constructions as much as possible from the viewpoint, perspectives and stances taken up by the storyteller may also serve to foreground key understandings of personhood, understandings which preserve respect for human beings as 'genuine persons'. For, through prioritising the person as storyteller, narrator, meaning maker, and the self (as) concept, we are better placed to study what it is to live humanly, how people take up personal stances in relation to one another, learning and everyday life, how moral agency, responsibility and choice are shaped and demonstrated as well as constrained in everyday life.

There are several component concepts of personhood that I find illuminating for the purposes of interpretive analysis within the life-as-narrative analogy, namely, the allied concepts of personal stance, moral agency and enacted drama. Each allows for an understanding of meaningful personal action within history, for continuity and discontinuities of a person's life story or project over time and place, and for the essentially relational and social nature of persons and personhood. Because many frameworks for analysis do not allow for this, it is important to consider each in turn.

• self/other relations and potential space

Whilst acknowledging that a unitary concept of the self is contested, researchers using interpretive explanation in the process of connecting action to its meanings often find a recurrent unity or identity in a person's narratives or life story, conceived of and evaluated as a whole. This is consistent with the holist's belief in the inter-relationship of diverse parts to the whole (Diesing 1972).

From a narrative perspective, Macintyre (1984, p.206) proposes 'a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end'. He deliberately shifts the location of unity from a property of self-formation to the narrative and the social history of its construction. Another way is to think of continuities and discontinuities of self-narratives or a life project over time in terms of the metaphor of ***infinite variations on a theme***, as in a musical composition (Holland 1975, Grant 1982). Applying psychoanalytic insights, we may term a recurrent theme or life project manifestly varied, improvised or orchestrated - an identity theme, shaped in the earlier interactions between self and other, especially between infant and primary caregivers, usually the mother.

The child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1963) developed the concept of an intermediate zone between self/other, a potential space, a third area in which all cultural experiences are located. Or, as some (Holland 1975, Grant 1982, 1986) would argue, this third area can seen as the potential space in which all self/other interactions or transactions take place, be they with cultural texts and artifacts, objects, or other persons.

It would be interesting to explore the connections between Winnicott's concept of potential space and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. Both offer an understanding of an essential relationship between inter- and intra-psychic activity and experiences; both provide insight into the socially embedded *and* personal nature of human learning; both can act as potential correctives to the fallacy of reducing theories of human formation and learning to an either/or - to being either personally *or* socially constituted.

• personal stance and transformative learning

Lusted, quoted by Lather (1991, p.85), gives a pedagogical account of the notion of an intermediate potential space in suggesting that pedagogy addresses 'the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies - the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they together produce'. The learning is socially transactive and transformative; it is the joint and individual knowing and coming to know that is made possible by the interaction of three agencies. Potential for change is located within that space.

Phillida Salmon (1990) uses the metaphor of *personal stance* to refer to the individual and social positioning of a person in relation to learning and to life. It can be developed as another way of looking at the dynamic relationship between people, for instance between a teacher and a learner:

> Taking the metaphor of personal stance gives a different meaning, not just to learning, but also to teaching, which, as teachers we think about less often than we should. Because personal stance refers to the positions which each of us takes up in life, this metaphor emphasises aspects of experience which go deeper than the merely cognitive, and which reflect its essentially relational, social and agentic character. In this it offers a view of learning as a vehicle for social change. (p.231)

In short, the related concepts of personal stance and potential space provide us with ways of attending to both personal and social change.

• moral agency and life as enacted social drama

The focus on the perspectives of individual persons and self-narratives is most likely to demonstrate moral understandings and reveal the place of agency and of responsibility for one's choices in life - in other words, the responsibility for the choices people make about the continuities and discontinuities of their lives compared with 'the 'received' versions of our own lives'.(White 1995,7-8). As the moral philosopher C. Stephen Evans puts it, 'To be a person is to be an agent, and to be an agent is to be engaged in a quest ... which constitutes personhood ... human beings as responsible agents have the power to choose' (1979, p.168).

I find it useful to read an interview transcript as a social drama - listening to and observing its narrator, cast of characters (who people this person's world, how they are portrayed, what 'roles' they are ascribed, etc), the scenes, settings and episodes, the plot, plotline and sequences, the asides, the aspirations, the highs, the lows, the central issues, and so on. These dramatic features are all indicative of people's perceptions of what happens in this life, of what life is like.

The metaphor of life as *enacted dramatic narrative* brings a concomitant focus on action and history, as the moral philosopher Alasdair Macintyre (1984) emphasises:

> What I have called a history is an enacted dramatic narrative in which the characters are also the authors... The difference between imaginary characters and real ones is not in the narrative form of what they do; it is in the degree of their authorship in that form, and of their deeds.' And it is constrained by actions of others and by social settings... An action is always an episode in a possible history. (215-216)

In conclusion, the conflict between humanist and post-modern versions of the self requires some comment. Critics of a narrative perspective tend to assume that it is synonymous with humanistic and progressive versions of the self. My reply to that is twofold.

First, there are important values associated with humanistic perspectives that I wish to preserve. For instance, writing his book *Preserving the Person* 'from a *humanist* perspective', Evans explains the varied meanings of the word thus: as a scholar trained in the 'humanities'; as 'someone who cares about human beings and what it means to exist humanly'; and someone who holds to a 'faith in the personhood of persons ... that human beings are genuine persons' (1979, pp.159-160).

These meanings might be contrasted with more naturalistic, modernist versions of humanism which emphasise autonomous, rational human beings in control of their own destinies and conscious selves. For instance, as Windschuttle (1994, p.124) states in his critique of Foucault, 'Humanists have long shared commitment to the idea [that] ... the human subject, (consciousness and will) is the originator of human actions and understanding'.

This brings me to the second point in reply, that by understanding the personal as relational, within the context of the social and political dimensions, we can make the necessary qualifications to the tendency of naturalistic, secular humanism to overestimate the scope for choice, authorship, autonomy, freedom and rationality. There are important understandings and values in relation to persons that I would want to preserve, and view somewhat differently according to the personal, social and political dimensions of the narrative perspective. These concern the sanctity and value of the person and persons, the interpretation of action within the context of agency, the paradox of the one and the many - a unity and plurality of persons and narratives, and the relational nature of persons as social beings, the interplay of conscious and unconscious, intrapsychic and interpsychic learning and being.

If persons and personal narratives are taken as a single, autonomous frame, then experience and meaning making will be taken as unproblematic as in the 'realist tale' (Lather 1991). It is crucial that the narrative perspective goes far beyond the personal self-narratives and local forms of 'storying' to take up the broader social and cultural narratives; that we vary the narrow range of focus from the personal and individual focus to bring into the foreground the social, cultural and ideological dimensions, i.e. to the wider perspectives implicit in a well told individual narrative tale.

Social narratives: Stock of alternative stories about what life might be, other versions of life-as-lived.

This dimension can be seen as an interface between the personal and the political, or to put it differently the personal is social and political. Rosen draws attention to the interface between the personal and the social in storytelling:

> Richard Bauman, who has studied both folkstories and personal tales, has come to the conclusion that an essential feature of managing our social lives is 'people telling stories to each other as a means of giving cognitive and emotional coherence to experience, constructing and negotiating social identity ... investing the experiential landscape with moral significance'. Not only do we have story telling minds but we become social beings through storytelling ... not only the great novels but modest little tales can lay claim to profound function. Great debate has waged for millenia about what constitutes the essence of being human. We can now propose as a candidate the disposition to narrate experiences. (1993: pp. 149-150)

The second dimension is that of the socially available narratives - a multiplicity of alternative stories to which individuals and groups have or may be denied access. Social formations of 'identities', social contexts of 'storying', and related sociocognitive processes are part of the social constructions of reality. Here the focus is directly on 'self as process', persons-in-activities, social relations and networks, and the *social constructions* of reality. With this dimension we might ask of case-study evidence: What social ways of talking, thinking and being (social discourses) have positioned, 'shaped up' or constructed versions of what counts as being a person for this individual in this society? How have families, groups, communities, institutions, societies, cultures and cultural traditions participated in, and been implicated by, these constructions?

On its own, however, a social construction focus is limiting. For instance self-categorisation theory defines the self as only a social process, and identity as conferred only through membership of groups, without any stable identity construction. Or, as Macintrye (1984) argues, Goffman's definition of the self in terms of social roles results in 'a liquidation of the self' and the understanding of persons.

In terms of research analysis, the same or similar transcript data and narrative mode of analysis may be used for both the personal and social dimensions. For instance, Bruner (1988), in studying life narratives, analysed individual interviews with the four members of one family. Four individual life narratives were written, and then through comparative analysis the ways of constructing reality common in the narratives of the two parents, the son and the daughter were established. For instance, even as the children deliberately contrasted their own life aspirations and ways of being with those of their parents, they were already and unwittingly participating in the same boundaries or bounded possibilities of time and place. That is, the life narratives that two generations of family members were discursively constructing and constructed by revealed a similar 'stock' of narrative resources - alternatives, possibilities and constraints - comprising and limiting the socially available versions of how life might be lived.

A key approach to analysing and interpreting the individual as well as the family life narratives was:

> ... by asking how verbs tell us about the ways we view time or action or place in our lives. Does this life teller use active verbs that indicate feelings or beliefs? Do regularities in word choice or particular styles, such as linear or non linear, tell us how we construct reality?... In autobiography, as in other genres, language provides us with a way of ordering experience and reflecting on it as well. (Editor's note, Bruner 1988, p.574)

This example of family narratives bears out the more general point - which applies to each layer in Figure 2 and becomes particularly apparent in the wider contexts of the second and third layers - that people discursively construct for themselves identities out of the resources to which they have access. With Layer 1 the focus is on the personal realities, perspectives, and themes shaping this construction; with Layer 2 the focus shifts to the social realities, the available resources and different possibilities to which social groups have, might have, or are constrained from having, access. Involved here are issues of power relations and access, although these come into prominence from the vantage point of the third and outer dimension.

Cultural, ideological and political narratives

> ...in attending to these...**we discern contestation as the condition of life** ... And when we discern contestation as the condition of life, the politics of inequality and marginalisation, of oppression and subjugation, of dominance and submission, of exploitation and resistance are foregrounded. (White 1995, pp.216-217)

More broadly, at the outer layer is the dimension of the culturally preferred and institutionally legitimated narratives and ways of being, including the cultural, ideological and political constraints on the self.

This dimension foregrounds the culturally competing, preferred, privileged or dominant stories of a society; and the histories of their conditions, contestations and the consequences of their production. Whereas the initial, inner focus on life stories will have given a greater sense of *personal perspectives* of reality and the possibilities for individual choice, decision making and moral responsibility, the outer dimension leads to problematising and deconstructing notions of choice, agency, authorship / authoring, personal growth and development. It involves problematising notions of the self, as well as opening up potential spaces for the possibilities of resistance to the received social versions. However, the problematising of notions of persons and the self does not necessarily mean rejecting either the personal narrative or socially alternative dimensions. Rather, it should make for a more complex three-dimensionality and also open up the gaps and spaces for resistance to become a possibility. It is this more complex juxtaposing of positionalities that Stanley's (1992) comments on the 'self' advocates, as cited in Rowland (1995, p.32):

> ...'self' is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but certainly a highly complex truth: a fictive truth reliant on cultural convention concerning what a 'life' consists of and how its story can be told in speech and, somewhat differently, in writing. But this does not mean that such writings have no points of connection with the material realities of everyday life; **it rather emphasises how complex this relationship is and that neither realism nor total rejection of it will do.** (Stanley 1992, pp.242-3. Emphasis added.)

Stanley's concluding statement (emphasised) is an important one. Too often the unsatisfactory realism or the total rejectionist notions of the self are posed as the only logically possible options consequent to problematising. This need not be the case. For the same reasons, the narrative perspective can be retained instead of rejected. That is, problematising can serve to broaden narrative to include contested stories, disrupted narratives, critical social and political stances, as for instance White (1995) envisages.

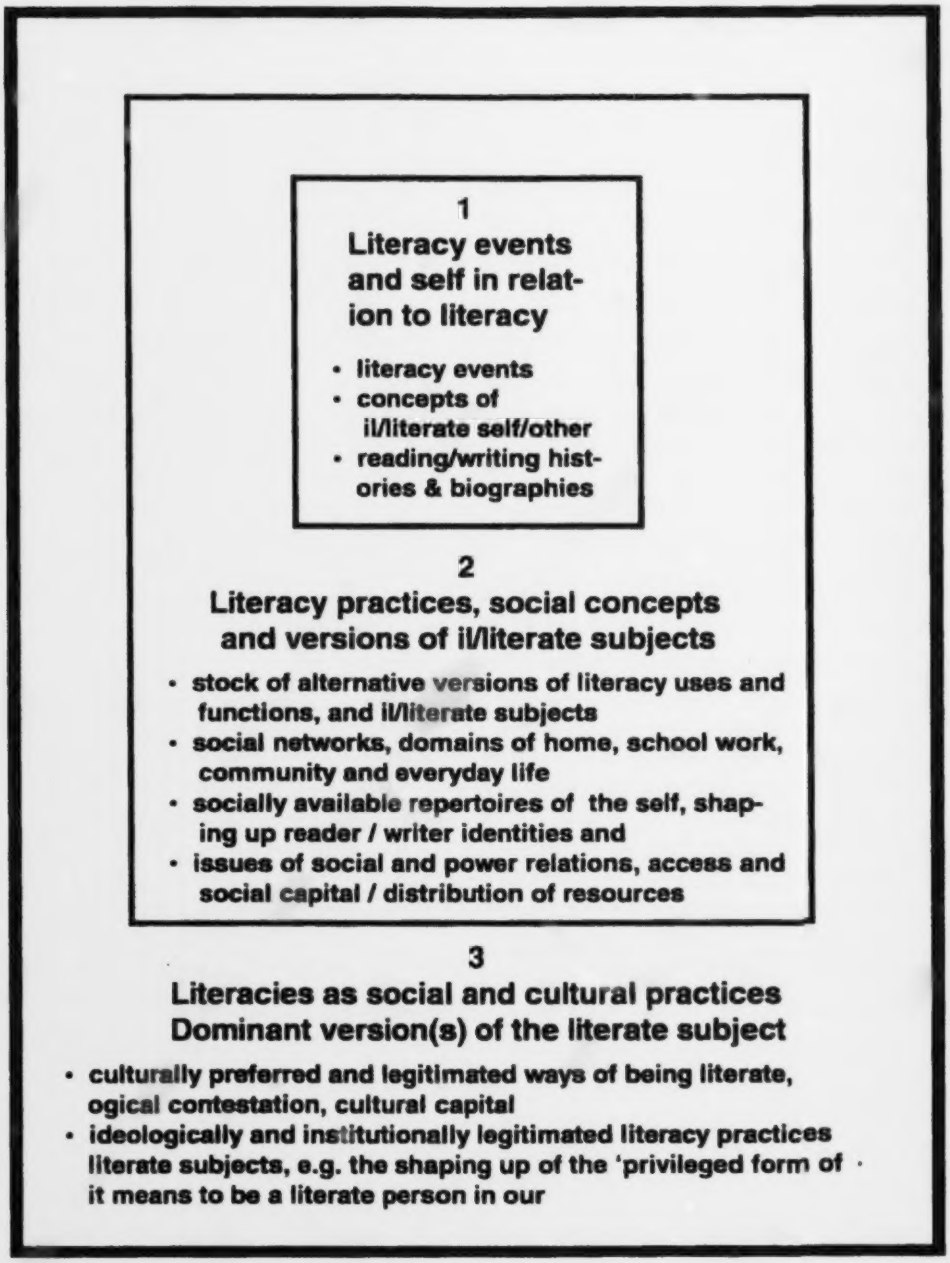
Furthermore, working in this third dimension requires us as researchers to attend to developments in social and critical theory, to become critically reflective about our own stance and unexamined assumptions, and:

> ... to consider the various ways that we are, or might be, reproducing dominant culture within [our own] discipline ... and how various aspects of this cultural reproduction might not be helpful ... Critical thought encourages us to review our assumptions, and to render visible some of our everyday taken-for-granted practices of life and of relationships ...(White 1995:12)

These are considerations we will return towards the end of the paper in relation to the discussion of social discourses.

B. Constructions of what counts as literacy: Literacy as critical social practice

I am interested in addressing the same kind of challenges in the analysis of qualitative research data where literacies, literacy practices and literacy learning are the focus of inquiry. As with the narrative perspective, a key challenge is to reconceptualise 'literacy' away from simplistic notions and polarised and one-dimensional positions and instead to hold together, at least in constructive tension, various dimensions and complexities which range from the micro to the macro. This requires alternative terminology from that of the common myths of supposedly 'technical', 'neutral' skills and context-free notions of literacy. A much needed counterperspective is to focus on persons-in-activities and social relationships, and thereby to appreciate the wealth of funds of knowledge (Moll and Greenberg 1990, p.327) all language users have available. Literacy is not a property, attribute or ability of a person. Rather, reading and writing are best understood as social practices and cultural ways of making and taking meanings, learnt and contested in everyday situations of use (Grant 1997).



1

Literacy events and self in relation to literacy

- literacy events
- concepts of il/literate self/other
- reading/writing histories & biographies

2

Literacy practices, social concepts and versions of il/literate subjects

- stock of alternative versions of literacy uses and functions, and il/literate subjects
- social networks, domains of home, school work, community and everyday life
- socially available repertoires of the self, shaping up reader / writer identities and
- issues of social and power relations, access and social capital / distribution of resources

3

Literacies as social and cultural practices Dominant version(s) of the literate subject

- culturally preferred and legitimated ways of being literate, ogical contestation, cultural capital
- ideologically and institutionally legitimated literacy practices literate subjects, e.g. the shaping up of the 'privileged form of · it means to be a literate person in our

Figure 3

Constructions of literacy: Literacies as critical social practices

Figure 3 is an attempt to build a three-dimensional social model of literacy that can serve to foreground the micro through to the macro nature of literacy events, concepts and practices and to consider the social ways meaning is constructed both by and for the individual.

A focus on literacy events, literacy practices and social relations as embedded within social and political practices assists with a reconceptualising and recontextualising of what counts as literacy and as successful reading and writing in our society, and hence also of what research directions are most promising.

This shifts our attention beyond the domain of official 'school literacy' and formal education, towards the innumerable everyday literacy events and practices in and though which reading and writing are done, the purposes, uses and functions served thereby in community and other school contexts, settings or domains, and the wider communicative discourse and social practices in which literacies are embedded. The research work of Heath, Street, Fairclough and Barton contributes to this burgeoning area of the 'new literacy studies'.

Literacy events, literacy practices and social conceptions

First, Heath (1982) defines ***literacy events*** as:

> any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes.

Clearly such events and literacy-related activities attract the fine-grained observation and microscopic analysis of ethnographers and ethnomethodologists with their commitment to a social perspective of persons in activities, of norms and conventions shaped by social relationships and group construction of the culture.

Second, the concept of ***literacy practices*** serves to contextualise literacy events in this way. Street (1986, p.3) proposes the term as a:

> broader concept, pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behaviour and conceptualisation related to the use of reading and/or writing ... Literacy practices incorporate not only 'literacy events' but also 'folk models' of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them.

Implicit, then, in literacy practices are ***social conceptions*** including implicit assumptions about what literacy is, what it is for, whose interests it is deemed to serve, and what are the attributed consequences for users, and so on. Heath (1980/1986, pp.15-16) distinguishes between *literacy functions* ('what literacy can do for individuals') and *literacy uses* ('what individuals can do with literacy skills') and contrasts the generally assumed functions and uses of mainstream definitions with 'the social meanings of reading and writing across ... time periods, cultures, or contexts of use' (cited in Grant 1993, p.7).

Other terms that assist in investigating literacy practices as social practices are ***domains, reader and writer identities, roles, and networks***. The terms 'domains' and 'roles' are elaborated by Barton (1991):

- **domains**

> ... enables us to contrast home, school, and work situations... To these we add the domain of everyday literacy ... How we decide that something constitutes a separate domain is going to be defined partly sociologically - that it constitutes a distinct social situation - but more by the fact that it involves identifiably different types and uses of literacy... and is sustained in particular ways ... Behind home, school, and work can be seen particular institutions that support these distinct domains. Particular definitions of literacy and associated literacy practices are nurtured by these institutions. They are definition-sustaining institutions. (1991, pp.5,7)

- **roles**

> Who does what? ... The importance of talking in terms of roles is that the way people act is not just related to their abilities but is influenced by socially constructed roles ... Roles exist within networks of support.(1991, p.9)

In particular, Fingeret's (1983) study based on interviews with adult literacy learners established the importance of interdependent social networks in their lives.

Third, and more broadly still, is the dimension of literacy as ***social and cultural practices***, and of ideological and political contestations.

> What the particular practices and concepts of reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely technical ... (Street 1984, p.2)

Street's (1986) perspective of 'literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society' is supported by very substantial research, from historical and documentary studies of literacy (Graff 1987, Luke 1987, Green, Hodgens and Luke 1994), and ethnographic and cross cultural studies (Heath 1983, Scribner and Cole 1978, Street 1984/1993, Taylor 1983/1993, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1986).

While issues of *access and social capital* are already implicit in literacy practices and concepts, they come to the fore explicitly in the third, outer dimension. As Allan Luke (1995) summed up his message to English teachers:

> There is no pay off literacy. There is no product guarantee literacy. That whether literacy makes a difference in people's lives all depends'. Literacy may be necessary, but it is not sufficient, for success in our society, let alone for achievement in the school system, as recent research on 'disadvantaged' schooling alerts us. Nor is literacy sufficient to guarantee low-income families credentials that will be recognised, or access to better jobs, however good the literacy program may be. 'What is needed is a volatile mix of (cultural) capital, money and social access. (Luke 1995)

One ramification of this is the importance of recognising that literacy practices and identities are never neutral, value-free constructions. For instance, the connection of 'behaviour to its supposed determinants' as in myths such as reported by the heading of an Australian newspaper article, 'Illiteracy is to be blamed on poorer parents', operates to blame individual families and students. Shifting the focus away from 'individual abilities', 'skills' and deficits as sole explanations and onto the effects of institutional structures and issues of access and support depersonalises blame and changes the discourse to one of social practices. Such a shift is called for by a major documentary study of debates over literacy in the popular print media and public forums in Australia during the postwar period 1945-1994. As this research by Green, Hodgens, and Luke (1994) concluded, the considerable difficulties with literacy experienced by some people need to be understood as 'the historical products of inadequate institutional access and support', and not as matters of 'personal and individual failure ... deficit, handicap or lack'.

Two illustrations of the interplay between and across the three dimensions of Figure 3, the perspective on literacy as critical social practice, follow. The first illustration concerns ***versions of literate subjects, identity, personhood, and possible worlds.*** Again, strands of particular interest to follow through these three dimensions are concepts of the self, identity and personhood in relation to literacy. that emerge in the life stories of adults who are 'taking on' literacy practices (Gribble and Grant 1992), the social identities and discourses of the literate self and of the 'illiterate other' (Horsman 1989), and the sociohistorical 'shaping up of versions of the literate subject', evident for instance in post-World War 2 documents from newspapers. (Green, Hodgens and Luke 1994). The latter study established four major versions of the literate person being shaped up in newspaper documents covering four decades of popular debate on literacy crises. These were categorised respectively by decades: 1950s - the Moral Subject, 1960s - the Technical / Skilled Subject, 1970s - the Deficit / Disadvantaged Subject, and 1980s - The Economic Subject. These four versions are still with us today, but the 1980s one is probably the dominant rhetoric, certainly in relation to vocational education and training, labour market reform and literacy in the workplace. The researchers concluded that 'literacy crises occur in relation to larger moral panics over economic, political , cultural and technological change' and that the popular debate in the press and public forums has less to do with whether literacy standards or practices are actually increasing or declining but 'more to do with how, by whom, and in whose interests versions of the literate person will be defined'

Street's conclusions from cross-cultural perspectives and research explain the connections between literacy practices and personhood:

> ... literacy practices are constitutive of identity and of personhood ... [i.e.] that, whichever forms of reading and writing we learn and use, have associated with them certain social identities, expectations about behaviour and role models. (1992, p.1)
>
> Different literacy practices, then, are associated with different notions of the self. Similar sets of associations can be seen in this culture, once the significance of literacy for these processes is recognised. Whether we attend a course or school, or become involved in a new institutional set of literacy practices, through work, political activism, personal relationships etc., we are doing more than simply decoding script, producing essays or writing a proper hand; we are taking on - or resisting - the identities associated with those practices. The idea that literary practices are constitutive of identities provides us with a different - and I would argue more constructive - basis for understanding and comparing literacy practices in different cultures than the current emphasis on a simple literacy/illiteracy dichotomy. (1992, p.44)

The strongest contrasts are between constructs of literacy as mechanical skills or as social practices, and between versions of naive or critically literate subjects. That is, versions of what counts as literacy, the literate self, the 'illiterate other' and whose interests should be served thereby differ radically according to whether autonomous or sociocultural perspectives are held. Without a focus on literacy as social concepts and practices, as bound up with social relations, power and cultural values, the autonomous theories of literacy perpetuate an objectivist myth, misdiagnose 'illiteracy' or 'literacy' as the problem, and prescribe doses of mechanical 'literacy' as the solution.

The second illustration across the three layers or dimensions of literacy concerns a model of reading as critical social practice. Luke and Freebody (1993) argue that there are four necessary components to being a successful reader in Western societies and that it would be better to see all four components as necessary, distinct but not additive, not add-ons. These are posed as questions about roles and can, in effect, be readily mapped onto the three dimensional conception of literacy in Figure 3.

- ***'How do I crack this code?'*** **Learning your role as *code breaker***

The first question dominates in the more traditional cognitive/behavioural psychological approaches. But to understand and use texts in our society requires at least three other components, which can be termed semantic, pragmatic and critical dimensions/competence (Luke and Freebody 1993). That is, to read successfully, contemporary readers need also to ask three further questions. These are, as posed by Luke and Freebody:

- ***'What does this mean?'*** **Learning your role as *text participant* in a semantic system that entails taking and making meanings;**
- ***'What do I do with this, here and now?'*** **Learning your role as *text user.*** And ...
- ***'What is this text trying to do to me?'*** **Learning your role as *text analyst.***

These three elements, together with 'coding competence', form 'reading as critical social practice' (Luke and Freebody 1993).

The first two questions relate to literacy events. At best, code cracking - 'learning your role as code breaker' of a grapho-phonic system - is only one component of reading and in isolation a nonsensical 'reading' exercise - a parody, at that. In humanist, person-centred and reader-response approaches, the focus would be on the *text participant role*.

In functional information-processing, process and social-contexts approaches, the *text user role* would be foregrounded. In post-structuralist, deconstructive, critical and post-modern approaches the focus is on the *text analyst role*.

> What is omitted from psychological approaches is recognition of two key aspects of reading and texts. First, reading is not a private act but a social practice, not a matter of individual choice or proclivity but of learning the reading practices of an interpretive community. Second, texts are not timeless aesthetic objects or neutral receptacles for information. Rather they are important sites for cross-generational building of discourses and ideology, identity and power within these same communities.
>
> ... The question of how and what to teach as reading in adult education is not solely a pedagogical question... reading is a sociological and, ultimately, political question... How nations, communities and school systems decide to shape the social practices of reading are cultural decisions tied up with how power and knowledge are to be distributed in print cultures. (p.25)

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu repeatedly points out that one never simply learns 'language' and 'literacy' but, more importantly, learns a 'disposition' towards language and literacy, a social relation to texts and textuality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1989, p.25).

This leads us back to notions of literacy practices and pedagogy as constructing *social worlds and literate subjects:*

> Literacy is a 'socially contested term', and as such debate about literacy... ultimately comes down to moral choices about theories one wants to hold, based on the sort of social worlds these theories underwrite in the present and make possible for the future. (Gee 1990, p.139)

The contrast between an account of literacy in terms of events, social conceptions and practices on the one hand and the following definition of 'reading as decoding phonics' (Swallow 1995) on the other is vast. According to Swallow (1995: p. 12), "Literacy is the mastery of the basic skills of encoding and decoding letters and sounds"; literacy levels are alarmingly low; illiteracy breeds other problems and their eradication requires drill in the basic skills.

The two accounts shape up radically different versions of what a literate person and our society should be like. Literacy concepts and practices, in much the same way as other discourses, construct identities and possible worlds -

particular kinds of readers and writers, and preferred ways of being as persons and citizens.

Swallow's full account shapes up a robotic version of the literate person, a male simpleton, a rule follower. 'Getting' or 'having' literacy requires no thought, questioning or meaning making but merely the precise following of the 'correct' prescription - 'a dose of phonics' that lasts a lifetime 'provided you have (also) ... practised from left to right without guessing and know a few simple rules about language' (p.11). In the phonics-version world, reading instruction is direct and prescriptive; behaviour is to be rule-, sequence- and procedure-governed; variables including guessing or questioning are ruled out; the atmosphere is one of a test laboratory; and a major goal is practising for automatic responses on cue. A covert moral and political agenda is being constructed around issues of conformity, power and control and in relation to preserving an established order or status quo.

In the critical social-practice model, reading instruction focuses on 'ways of working with, talking about and back to and second guessing texts'. Analysing, interrogating and challenging textual discourse is encouraged. An overtly different social world and political agenda is being served, one that favours critical debate and the possibilities of resistance:

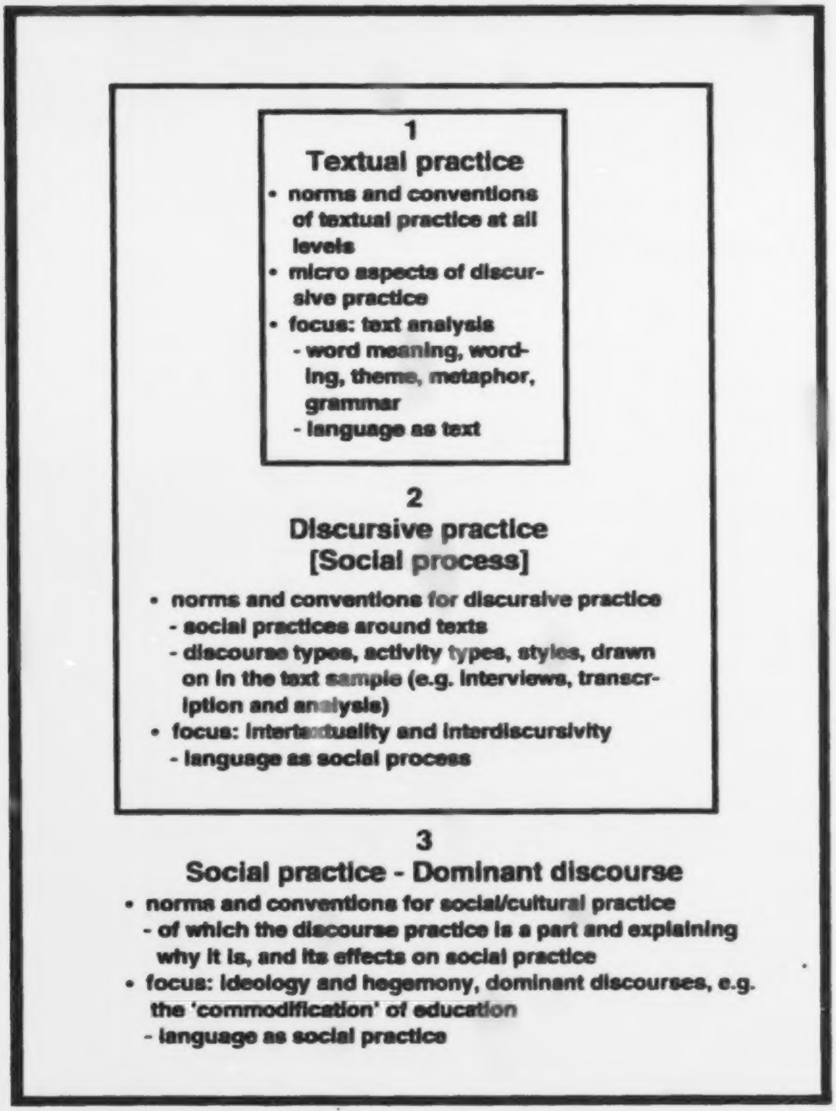
> In the larger context of workplace reform and social justice, a literacy as critical social practice that values critique, analysis, innovation and appraisals for action may be of social, economic and political benefit for the community, for the individual, and ultimately for the nation. (Luke and Freebody 1993:26).

C. A social theory of language: Discourse and discourse analysis

The first two perspectives may leave unsystematic the ways texts and transcripts might be analysed, beyond the thematic and literacy forms of analysis of narratives and the social practice focus in the dimensions of literacy events, practices, domains, identities, and so on. What the third perspective offers is a more systematic and theorised approach to analysis based on studying language in social context and as social discourse.

The perspective proposed draws on Fairclough's (1992) recent work on a social theory of discourse, which extends linguistic and discourse analysis traditions to provide a framework for investigating 'discursive change in relation to social and cultural change'. His objectives are:

to bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language, in the form of a framework that will be suitable for use in social scientific research, especially in the study of social change (Fairclough 1992, p.62).



1
Textual practice

- norms and conventions of textual practice at all levels
- micro aspects of discursive practice
- focus: text analysis
  - word meaning, wording, theme, metaphor, grammar
  - language as text

2
Discursive practice
[Social process]

- norms and conventions for discursive practice
  - social practices around texts
  - discourse types, activity types, styles, drawn on in the text sample (e.g. interviews, transcription and analysis)
- focus: intertextuality and interdiscursivity
  - language as social process

3
Social practice - Dominant discourse

- norms and conventions for social/cultural practice
  - of which the discourse practice is a part and explaining why it is, and its effects on social practice
- focus: ideology and hegemony, dominant discourses, e.g. the 'commodification' of education
  - language as social practice

Figure 4 A three-dimensional conception of discourse

(Adapted from Fairclough 1992, p.73.)

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As developed, then, Fairclough's three-dimensional model brings together micro and macro traditions of analysis:

> the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis ... the macro-sociological tradition of analysis of social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or micro-sociological tradition of seeing social practice as something people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of commonsense procedures. (1992, p.72).

Figure 4 follows in the main the three dimensions Fairclough proposes for analysing discourse: text, discursive practice and social practice:

> This [combined] concept of discourse and discourse analysis is three dimensional. Any discursive 'event' (ie. any instance of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. The **text** dimension attends to the language analysis of texts. The '**discursive practice**' dimension ... specifies the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation... The '**social practice**' dimension attends to issues of concern in social analysis such as the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event ... and the constitutive/ constructive effects of discourse. (1992, p.4)

Variations of this social model of language following Fairclough (1989) have been developed by Clark and Ivanic (1991), and a model of language in social context by Baynham (1995) following Kress (1988) and Fairclough (1989). To summarise Baynham's (1995, pp.21-22) useful elaboration of the middle category of 'Language as social process': this is the 'most accessible of the three layers; it presents 'doing things with words' as purposeful social process'; it represents the 'ways language is interactionally accomplished in contexts of situation (for example, the concept of genre)'; and it 'captures the ways in which social activity is achieved through language'. 'A focus on this layer is a focus on the active, purposeful, 'doing things with words' dimension of language'

The concerns germane to Fairclough's recent work are, above all, those foregrounded by the macro, third dimension:

Discourse as a mode of political and ideological practice

> Discourse as a political practice establishes, sustains and changes power relations, and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations

> obtain. Discourse as an ideological practice constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations. (1992, p.67)

> Discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them: different discourses constitute key entities (be they 'mental illness', 'citizenship' or 'literacy') in different ways, and position people in different ways as social subjects. (1992, pp.3-4).

Fairclough also elaborates the constructive effects of discourse as threefold, corresponding to the three functions of language and dimensions of meaning which co-exist and interact in all discourse. Discourse contributes to the construction of:

1. 'social identities' and 'subject positions' for social 'subjects' and types of 'selves' - what he calls the 'identity' function of language;

2. social relationships between people - the 'relational' function of language; and

3. systems of knowledge and belief,- the 'ideational' function of language.

4. A 'textual' function which Halliday (1978) distinguishes might be added (Fairclough 1992, pp.64-65).

A detailed research example follows of 'discursive disadvantaging follows:

The powerfulness of applying a social theory of discourse to qualitative research can be illustrated by a number of studies of perspectives on poverty, schooling and literacy, which document the shaping up of deficit/disadvantaged identities and discourses in versions of the 'disadvantaged' students and families and of normative or 'ideal' versions of 'advantaged' families. One major example, an Australian research study of 'literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic urban communities'(Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn 1995), analyses the way school personnel make culturally-specific catergorisations of low socio-economic status families, with negative and far-reaching repercussions. The project involved six Queensland schools accessing 12 classrooms, in the first three years of school, and 20 families. Interpretive analysis, including conversational analysis of classroom talk and of the home and school interviews, yielded the most striking conclusions. One of these concerns is a major theme about the influence of families, emerging in the interview accounts of class and disadvantage given by the school personnel:

> The influence of the family was considered paramount at all SES (Socio Economic Status) levels. Parents of children from homes designated as disadvantaged were viewed as non-supportive. To be financially poor was interpreted as having parents who not only lack financial security but often also intelligence, knowledge, propriety and responsibility. Thus if children had problems their parents were frequently held responsible. On the other hand homes designated as middle-class were regarded in highly favourable terms. They were seen to provide the cultural and intellectual capital, including literacy instruction and modelling, and material and emotional resources which allowed students to succeed at school. (Vol.1, pp.x, 179)

For school personnel the types of families whose children attended the local school (including the families' capacity or willingness to supply the requisite support, material resources and experiences), as well as the types of communities 'were nearly always distinguished in terms of socio-economic status'.

'Poverty' was understood in far more than financial or material terms:

> In the descriptions and explanations given by the educators interviewed... poverty, as a group attribute, brings with it a complex and confidently drawn mosaic of associations to do with much more than material resources. A heavily-weighted baggage of moral, intellectual, social, physical, cultural and motivational dispositions is readily attached to poor people. Educators, like all of us, are members of a classed society. (Vol.1, p.xxi, and Vol.2, p.204)

The first two summary conclusions given in the Report concern the use of such categorisations to interpret literacy achievement:

> Most school personnel clearly and persistently generated categorisations associated with low socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, and general features of students' home backgrounds as a point from which to interpret students' literacy achievement.
>
> In schools within communities designated as disadvantaged, poor literacy achievement was accounted for by reference to the experience of poverty. The school's organisation and activities

> were rarely held responsible by school personnel. The role and conventions of the school went unquestioned ... The task of compensation was always one that addressed the student rather than the institutional practices of the school. (Vol.1, pp.x, 180)

A feature 'notable' in the school personnel accounts was 'value switching' in favour of the 'norm' of Anglo-Celtic, middle-class categories over the 'disadvantaged' categories. Here socio-economic status was operating as an overriding, explanatory classification, so that 'very similar literacy events and behaviour practised by low SES students and middle SES students' were being valued quite differently (p.180).

Close textual analysis of transcripts as evidence of discursive practices and social relations enabled these researchers to specify the ways discursive disadvantaging operated to shaping up versions of families, parents, children and communities in terms of one overriding characteristic - that of assumed deficits. By reducing and individualising complexities, the deficit discourse narrows both the imputation of blame for deficiencies and disadvantage, as well as the responsibility for change, to an individual level, of *those* families, parents and children. The twin procedures of marginalising 'them' and exonerating 'us' thus take hold, and enact a process of 'discursive disadvantaging' of the 'other'. These procedures are explained by the interpretive analysis of the interview data in the Queensland research report thus:

> Two central procedures appeared to be operative in the talk of school personnel. One was the marginalising procedure. Here, certain categories of parents and students were nominated and designated as culturally 'other' than the 'norm-for-schooling'. The category white middle class signified the 'norm', sometimes explicitly. A 'normal' family composition was also set up or used as an implicit standard relational pair: a working father and a mother at home 'for the children'. The 'others' tended to be families in low SES communities or categories including NESB and ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) groups who were accounted for as culturally different.
>
> This process of marginalisation was directly implicated in the operation of a second procedure, exoneration. In this process the school was exonerated in the talk from major responsibility for low literacy achievement... (due to) the difficulties caused by the material-cultural differences and deficiencies of their clientele... (that is) the sheer difficulties of teaching 'these' students from 'these' families. (Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn 1995, Vol.1, pp.181, 176)

Taking a broader look at these conclusions, we can generalise about the ***'discursive disadvantaging enacted on certain categories of people'***. From an educational perspective 'it is the reading of material resources as educationally-crucial, social and intellectual resources that is the nub' (Vol 2, p.206). From a narrative perspective, it is the specifying of a dominant cultural story that is central. From a narrative perspective Michael White (1995) writes of the tendency of people in professional positions to enact such myths by 'reproducing the "privileged form" ... the culturally preferred way of being and thinking'. Thus, *a dominant cultural story* 'about what it means to be a person of moral worth in our culture', when applied prescriptively to categorise behaviour, can serve to marginalise further the very people the professionals (such as the school personnel) are endeavouring to help.

Such a research investigation lends itself to the application of micro through to macro dimensions as developed within and across the three perspectives (Figures 1-3 in this paper). Applying these three perspectives in research analysis may well yield new starting points and stances for theorists, researchers and practitioners. We might couch these in terms of starting points called for by interpretive explanations of 'disadvantaging discourse'.

One starting point is *to recognise and try to deal with the 'discursive disadvantaging' and 'cultural reproduction'*, in which we are all implicated. At one level this requires attention to the words we use, and the social discourses we live out of, which construct and limit the realities we can know and address, and shape what does, and can, go on in professional contexts (Connell, Johnstone and White 1992, cited in Freebody *et al.* 1995). Hence our need to be careful by choosing sensitive terminology, by avoiding 'deficit' labelling, and by attempting to make visible our cultural assumptions.

Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) recommend that we indicate 'the 'specialness' of advantaged students' as 'students whom public institutions *advantage*', by developing a vocabulary that makes visible this otherwise tacit 'advantaged norm'. Conversely, we should avoid attributing a deficit status to others (individuals, families or communities) through describing them as 'disadvantaged'. In other words, 'disadvantaged' should not be used 'as a stand-alone adjective ... an informative description of them as people', but only 'as the participle of a transitive verb' - '*disadvantaged* by somebody' or somebody's activities', (Vol.2, p.206).

At a deeper level, the deconstructing of 'disadvantaging discourse' requires a repositioning of ourselves and an opening up of spaces for others, including in relation to power.

While White (1995) is primarily concerned with the professional interactions of family therapists, his account, following Rosaldo, of a 'more culturally-visible position', is pertinent to educators and policy makers alike.

> Such a positioning of ourselves, that renders us more culturally visible, goes some way toward both acknowledging and dismantling the hierarchies of power that feature in (professional) interaction. Renato Rosaldo in talking about the myth of detachment that is nurtured by middle and upper-middle class professionals, points to the extent to which this myth is maintained through a denial of the cultural and ethnic location of these professionals, and the extent to which the invisibility of their culture and ethnicity, as juxtaposed to the visibility of the culture and ethnicity of the 'other', conceals their dominant class position and ensures their 'unspoken monopoly of power'. (White 1995, p.219)

Applying these insights to our professional research and practice, 'it becomes more possible for us to take responsibility for the real effects of our work on the lives of those persons who seek our help' (White 1995, p.13).

For instance, in the field of family literacy, as researchers, educators and providers seek to work with and alongside parents and community agencies, to share the power and resources and to collaborate in decision making, they are repositioned to facilitate the families to identify their own and their children's needs and desires in relation to literacy. Their alternative stories - their preferred ways of thinking and being (in contrast to the culturally dominant ones of 'discursive disadvantage' and blame, marginalisation and exoneration) - might then be listened to and enlisted to bring about family literacy programs that are successful, from the participants' point of view.

D. Summary across the three dimensions

By way of summary, this final section draws together in outline form some of the strands woven in relation to each of the three multi-dimensional perspectives and approaches to interpretive explanation developed in this paper.

1. At the ***micro, personal*** and person-centred level:
    a) self-narratives, life story, storying or re-storying our lives
    b) literacy events, self constructions, literacy concepts and practices

   c) textual practices, the micro aspects of discursive practices

2. Then the ***social constructions***:

   a) social narratives - 'stock of alternative stories, other versions of life -as-lived'

   b) literacy practices and social conceptions - networks, domains, institution-sustaining definitions of literacies

   c) discursive practice - intertextuality, interdiscursivity, social and institutional aspects of discourse

3. At a ***macro, cultural level***:

   a) 'culture as story' - dominant stories - the privileged form, preferred ways of being of a culture (e.g. dominant stories of what it means 'to be a person of moral worth in our culture')

   b) literacy as social and cultural practices - ideological, contested literacies and dominant versions of the literate subjects

   c) major discourses, sociohistorical context, selective traditions. Ideological and political effects of discourse on systems of knowledge and belief; social relations; and social identities ('selves')

   This is the level of the ideological and political contestation. Power relations are foregrounded, and culture is best understood as a verb (Street 1992), shaping up dominant versions and contestation.

Common to each 'field' is the focus on discursive practices and the respective claim that:

- *stories* (White 1995)
- *literacy as social practices* (Street 1992), and
- *discourses* (Fairclough 1992)

are constitutive of identity, profoundly shaping actions, meaning making, and the conditions and possibilities for resistance and change. The common influence of Foucault's discourse theory is evident here. For instance, combining an analysis of 'text' and 'discourse' could entail, on the one hand, drawing on psychosocial, perhaps psychoanalytic, insights into human experience, perception and meaning construction, in combination with the more socially oriented understandings of text as an instance of socially constructed discourse and cultural practices.

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Appendix 1: Qualitative research examples - life story or biography, dimensions of narrative

In the 20 years I have been using qualitative approaches to interviews and case study research, the narrative metaphor - of life as narrative - and human beings as storytellers - has provided a way of structuring, analysing and interpreting the research data. Three examples follow as illustrations.

- The first example comes from interview-based case studies of young readers and writers between the ages of 15-18 years, and their 'storying' of their lives.

  > This research set out to understand their reading of fiction in the context of the rest of their lives, their sense of themselves and their formation of identity or 'personal style' as young people growing up. Their constructions or 'storying' of meaning as readers and writers were analysed within the holistic 'storying' of their lives.
  >
  > For example, Joel as a 15-17 year old boy expresses a fascination with power, with becoming and staying a "really powerful person". This is a recurrent preoccupation in his thinking. But what kind of power is he interested in? By identifying and looking at the interrelationships between the main themes developed in his interview comments and in his writing over three years I could build a convincing account of the kind of power distinctions he was carefully distinguishing - re this kind and not that. Other connections also became clear - between being powerful and being a young male, being the oldest son in relation to his father and to a favoured sibling, being more 'at home' with his mother and maiden aunts, being an observer at school of his class peers and forming friendships with older boys. (Grant, 1982, 1983)

- The focus of the second research example is on the social dimension of narratives:

  > A more recent research project has taken an ethnographic orientation to documenting the complexity of adult literacy learning and teaching groups. Here the transcript data comprised recordings of ten consecutive class sessions for each of the sites, enabling a focus on adults 'doing literacy' in groups, co-constructing 'what counted' as reading and writing. Independent case studies were written for each group by the respective site practitioner and visiting researcher. Site

practitioners and some students were interviewed in each case. *(The pointers for analysis summarised in Appendix 2 were applied to this data.)*

- A third example is of multiple diverse readings and associated discourses:

> Other case studies of adults in literacy programs were written as life narratives, twelve stories of adults taking on literacy. A current project involves rereading these transcripts from diverse 'positionalities' (Lather, 1991) and theoretical perspectives, such as a realist account, a phenomenological reading and a feminist deconstructive reading. The aim is to compare the ways the self, personhood and identity are constructed by each reading, what is attended to and how, as well as what is omitted from each reading and the discourse which gives rise to it.

Appendix 2

The following notes indicate pointers that can be useful for analysis across the three dimensions outlined in sections A-C above.

How is literacy being constructed here?

What counts as literacy from this (practitioner/teacher/researcher's perspective?

Analysis of textual features used to construct reality/possible world/subject position (Kress). Cover range of constructions, inclusions/exclusions - what's valued/silenced:

1. **Wordings/namings/meanings** to construct possible social and natural worlds:

    - Theme
    - Metaphors used (implied ideological attachments and ways of dealing with things)
    - Recurrent key words

    What **values** do words have? Fairclough re values as

    - experiential: knowledge, beliefs, classification schemes
    - relational: social relations
    - expressive: evaluations - subjects' social identities

2. **Syntax** to establish dominant **processes/participants**:

    What values do grammatical features have? E.g. consider:

    - active/passive voice; positive/negative sentences
    - sentence modes - declarative/interrogative/imperative - positioning subjects differently; speaker/writer authority?
    - pronominalisation: how pronouns - "we", "you", are used? - inclusive/exclusive; authority claim?

- sentence connectors

Consider how the following are constructed:

- Agency/actors: who is doing what to whom, e.g.
    - how is person/selfhood constituted?
    - the adult learner/reader/writer/the (il)literate; social identities; the teacher; the relationship of knowledge, power and authority
    - group identities: how constructed - as agency; social relations and attributes
    - is agency clear? causality? responsibility? (Fairclough)
- Processes: actions/events/attributions, e.g.
    - teaching, assessment and literacy practices
    - reading and writing as transitive verbs
    - involving texts, genres, tasks; and
    - constraints, working conditions
    - culture as a verb (Street)

3. **Major discourses and ideologies**

- sets particular statements, key themes, topics, 'wordings' (Luke)
- particular ideologies/selective traditions available (e.g. as product of teacher training)
- "reading position" (Kress) i.e. how readers are positioned?

Chapter 8

An archetypal investigation of the experience of infertility in women: Observations drawn from a PhD in progress

Linda Fiske

A theoretical overview

Moustakas (1990), commenting on *Heuristic Research: Design and Methodology*, emphasises the essentials of self-search, self-dialogue, indwelling and intuition as openings toward the illumination and explication of problems, questions, and human concerns. He suggests that, after initial immersion in a topic, the 'heuristic design enables a significant illumination and clarification of a question, deepened and extended in awareness and meaning through dialogue with others' (p.170).

Moustakas' framework provides a succinct and accurate explanation of the process which underpinned the observations which are outlined briefly below. This writing addresses itself to a narrow focus, that being the indicators of process between two parties, which denote learning as a problematic interchange which crystallised out of intuition, self-search, and dialogue.

Reflections on process involved in the creation of meaning in both the researcher and the researched

This research grew out of the problem of living with infertility. The motivation to investigate was the lack of congruence between conceptual representation of experience and the multiple changing and ambiguous nature of the lived reality. The quality, significance and personal meaning of this experience are at present denied legitimacy in the dominant narrative which assigns it the status of grief or life crisis.

An intimate personal knowledge of the experience was both the prompt to action and the yardstick for assessing the appropriate approach for the research process. The intuitive assumption was that there was more to be shared and known consciously relating to living with infertility if the depths of the lived experience could be accessed and articulated. The aim of this collaborative study was to provide an opportunity for women to reflect on their experiences within a relationship of unconditional positive regard as outlined by Rogers (1961).

Accordingly, interviews were conducted with a set of open-ended questions used as a prompt to encourage the women to reflect broadly on their experience. Full transcripts were prepared using NUD*IST to give detailed line numbering and to facilitate categorisation; grounded theory being the objective. Two simple questions guided the investigation: 'What does this experience mean for the person who is living it?' and 'What is happening for this person?' These questions were dealt with on two levels by the researcher. Firstly, there was objective assessment of words in transcripts, which yielded information related to the individual's logical reconstruction of experience. Secondly, there were more subtle and obtuse outcomes resulting from the relationship and interaction between the parties, which had a bearing on the nature and the quality of the learnings which flowed from the study.

Close scrutiny of words provided the 'facts' as the infertile protagonists revealed them. However, ego rational assessment was not the level of consciousness which could provide an adequate base on which to build a theory related to the lived experience of infertility. It was only by entering and sharing the experience of infertility empathically that the researcher was enabled to explore hunches and float ideas from a point of credibility and with some authenticity. The theory which has emerged and the learnings which have crystallised for both parties, have flowed from tapping into the deep inner wisdom of the organism posited by theorists such as Rogers (1961) and Gendlin (1978).

The research relationship as a dynamic which influenced the quality and nature of learnings

There has been an ongoing process of learning in both the researcher and the researched. The line of demarcation between the parties was a dynamic boundary which functioned as part of the process.

Experts from a wide variety of disciplines observe and explain infertility; they do not explore the experience as a lived reality. In this study, the boundary between researcher and researched, self and other, was a problematic dynamic. The women interviewed were never objective 'subjects' because of the deep sense of knowing shared with the researcher. The quality of empathy at work on both sides resulted in a characterisation of a unique emic view (Pike 1966, in Smith *et al.*) which was intimately tied to the purpose of the study.

This research represented total immersion for the researcher. Living the experience of infertility and participating in therapy because of that experience, holding an adversarial role as president of a patient support group and undertaking research, were four aspects of life which fed on and informed each other. Constant contact with the problem under scrutiny was a double-edged sword. At times there was no escape to 'objective' high ground. On other occasions, when the exercise seemed bogged down, a phone call from a total stranger would restate the problem afresh in personal terms. These interventions served to quell uncertainty and to sustain and refine responses to problems which developed along the way.

Having lived the experience under investigation, there was a genuine sensitivity to what it was appropriate to ask and when a line of inquiry constituted an intrusion. There could be no disregard for such decorum. If information was offered, then it was reasonable to assume that the area was open for discussion. Adhering to this rule allowed the protagonists to define the areas for engagement. The sensitivity to others developed to a point where it became evident that the researcher, while sharing the process of others, was seeing her own experience reflected back for observation.

The nature of the information which was shared between the parties was unique in type and quality. Once articulated, it stands in stark contrast to the dominant narrative, which is shaped by professionals who have a point of contact with the infertile. Such conceptual representations of experience are partial truths offered in the voice of subject speaking on object and should not be promoted as adequate explanations of the protagonists' lived experience. In order for an absent narrative to be articulated in the voice of the subject, information of the nature revealed in interchange between these parties will need to be stated as a challenge to the dominant paradigm. In Kuhn's (1962) terms it is only when aberrant data are acknowledged as standing outside of the prevailing paradigm that paradigm shift may be initiated.

Perceived as an insider, the researcher had access to information which may have been withheld from an interested 'observer'. Women were willing to articulate their uncertainty, fear and anxiety when they felt that they were not being judged and assessed. A woman speaking about her experience of counselling prior to the use of donated genetic material explained: 'I knew that I was required by law to attend counselling, so the three of us went. I refused to answer her [the counsellor's] questions. This was not "counselling". She was assessing me. She became very angry and agitated about my response, but I held my ground.' This woman went on to speak frankly about why she had made her decision to use donated material and what her child meant to her after years of infertility treatment.

This study amounted to an experiential undertaking for both the researcher and the researched. Together self-searching and dialogue activated a process which in heuristic terms constituted personal learning. If the infertile are to initiate learning on a scale broad enough to provoke paradigm shift, their voices will need to be clear and insistent, for it is only as a result of ownership and self-education that they will build the basis for challenge to the dominant narrative.

Methodology on the ground: The part 'I' played in the outcomes

There was a constant tension and questioning in relation to the research process. Could I be 'authentic' as a person and be a researcher at the same time? Was I contaminating the outcomes or did my personal involvement constitute unique attunement to the creation of meaning in the self and the other?

Working out of a Rogerian framework, the aim was to hold the other in a state of unconditional positive regard. When a woman said: 'What I am about to tell you is pathetic!' I responded: 'Nothing people tell me is pathetic.' She replied: 'No, this is *really* pathetic!' The brutal honesty in the story which followed indicated a woman honouring experience which held no legitimate status in the world of detached objective reality. In that paradigm it showed her as 'pathetic' and potentially crazy. The research relationship acted in Harding's (1963) terms as a psychic container. Within this relationship these women felt free to look at experience for what it was, rather than what they assumed it ought to be.

The qualities of the relationship as psychic container which contributed to the creation of meaning

It was a particular form of engagement termed 'The Research Relationship' which initiated process, allowing some of these women to formalise learnings about what was 'known' in structures of consciousness other than the mental rational. The psychic container held all possibilities, while allowing for free play of potential stimulants and contingencies in interaction, and it was out of this base that insights took shape in both parties.

As a consequence of the research relationship, and the data which it generated, it became clear that there were two sets of knowledge pertaining to the experience of infertility. There was the rational explanation, the empirically observable, and there was a subjective world of internal experience which was much more difficult to discern. It was the psychic container in the form of a relationship which enabled the subjective experience of 'otherness' to make its presence felt in the research narratives.

In Moustakas' (1990) terms, methodology and the research question flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration (p.172). Because process cannot be grasped *per se*, it was the seeming conundrum of process as a series of hallmarks of what was absent in narratives examined as text, which emerged as the driving force behind this investigation. It was the constant movement between the macro-agenda of what was empirically observable and the micro-focus of what individuals said, and intimated themselves withholding, which created a space in which genuine interchange allowed for re-visioning.

In accordance with Moustakas' observation, process in the research relationship informed the methodology. It was an emergent heuristic research design which addressed the issue of the problem of the subjective aspects of experience which could be sensed, while standing defiant in the face of the rational explanation and conceptualisation of infertility.

This movement, or double reality, identified in the narratives was mirrored in the process of the researcher. A methodology which assumed that questions answered rationally and thoughtfully would reveal the depth of the experience was blatantly naive. Intuition, coupled with evidence in the data of hesitation, uncertainty, ambiguity, and outright contradiction in the texts, indicated that more was going on in both parties than could be adequately addressed by a dichotomy of consciousness-versus-unconscious process. Gebser's theory of multiple structures of consciousness was able to account for the uncertain movement in the dynamic which witnessed itself as the lived experience of infertility.

Gebser (1983), posits complex structures in consciousness, each tied to particular historic time-frames and social contexts with an efficient and deficient phase of functioning. In brief, the attributes of particular structures are as follows:

- **Archaic**, or primal, consciousness exhibited no sense of individual identity or time and space; this was an ego-less state of unity with the environment.
- **Magical** consciousness provided a period of identification with the clan. There was little language; communication was largely via shared image; life was enmeshed with the rhythms of nature.
- **Mythical** consciousness emerged at a time when experience moved from the instinctual, emotional mode to the imaginative verbal; there were stirrings of individual consciousness and the exploration of experience in both image and story.

Mental rational thought mutated out of the Mythical, when circumstances precipitated the need for abstract conceptual explanation of the workings of the world.

Gebser posits a fourth and **Integral**, or aperspectival, structure of consciousness, necessitated by the shortcomings of the mental rational consciousness to deal with the dispirited quality of contemporary living. He suggests that this immanent structure of consciousness will hold all previous qualities in some form of creative tension. It is Gebser's contention that each previous mutation of consciousness has subsumed the prior structure of consciousness while maintaining the elements of the old. This theory of multiplicity in structures of consciousness provided an explanation which could embrace the aberrant evidence which was present in the data. Once the problem had been redefined, that is, how to explain the role and power of the image which intimated experience beyond the explanation of the mental rational, the focus of the investigation needed to change. Analysis and theory building became the determinants of the methodological approach.

The following examples suggest the manner in which both researcher and researched were engaged at levels other than rational consciousness.

In her first interview a dancer said:

> You can't explain it in words. It is like every part of you is getting messages all at the same time ... so there is no way of saying ... you know, so how do you rationally explain something that is such a feeling, intense intimate thing? It doesn't seem to me that you are working out of the same spot if you start trying to put it to words, because it is just something that you know. It is like this knowingness. I don't know. I can't explain it! Like maybe you could dance it or write some music about it or something, but it doesn't seem like you could write it somehow.

An artist commenting on how she related her infertility to her work said:

> I do it through varying forms away from the just human. Because I think it is more than just the human form I am to express. It is just ... because it is a really emotional thing that I am trying to express, and emotions aren't an arm or a leg. A woman assessing my work once commented on the 'bleeding centrepiece'. I found that really interesting. Now there was no human form there at all. I think that sometimes that can be more powerful than opening it all out - 'Here is the open wound!'

The personal interaction between researcher and researched was a contingency which consistently functioned at levels other than the rational.

A woman speaking on her sadness about her mother's response to her infertility is a case in point . She said, 'I really regret that my mother has not been able to talk to me about how she feels sorry about all that has happened to me.' I could feel myself slipping into an emotional response to her pain. I had to make a decision either to keep swallowing on the lump in my throat, or give in to the wave of rising emotion. I began to cry. I said, 'I am supposed to be an objective researcher here, but I will do the crying while you talk!'

She went on to explain how she and her partner had coped with the problem of infertility. She concluded that she had dealt with the difficulties. She added, 'While I stay in this relationship where we have worked out the boundaries of the problem and our relationship to them, it will be OK. If this relationship changes and I am in different circumstances, I don't know what will happen.'

As a researcher, my sensing of the uncertainty in her logical explanation of the problem and its resolution came from a place in me other than my logic.

Listening to her exposition, I was witness to the tentative steps in the creation of meaning in the other.

This interview alerted me to the dynamic nature of 'being' infertile. The quality of the insight which emerged from such exchanges was related to the subtle attunement to process at work in both of us. It was a relationship which was the catalyst to learning here. I was both a participant in, and an observer of, process.

The heuristic approach bestowed legitimate status on experience which had been formally denied. Without the fear of judgement and assessment, the issues which these women felt they were unable to examine with outsiders were reframed as both significant and meaningful. The interview often provided an opportunity to establish a point of reference. Women wanted to know what others had said on a particular issue. I was often asked: 'Do other people say that?' In this sense the exchange could be affirming of self, in relation to a broader group of infertile women. For example, a woman mused:

> Do other people say that they feel free to be a natural mother? When I do react ... like they are not smacked, but I think I really should be free to be a natural mother, just able to do ... I mean, I don't want to smack them but there is guilt that goes with them. Maybe I am not as good a parent as what I thought I would have been.'

My own process could not be removed from what went on in that research relationship. I was sensitive to the feeling of being violated by the questions of other interested, well-meaning people. When other people asked me questions in order to satisfy their curiosity, their intent was self-serving. They seemed unaware of how it may feel to be the interrogated party. I felt I could only follow a line of questioning which had been indicated as of importance to the women in their searching. I did not feel free to pursue questions which would satisfy my own thirst for understanding.

It would be dishonest to pretend that my interaction with these women did not cause me to face issues which were my own living wounds. On one occasion I found myself in a therapy session dealing with a somatic problem I experienced every time I worked on a particular transcript.

Learnings which flowed from a re-visioning of experience

Some women felt confusion in relation to the process which had been initiated by the research relationship and their readiness to cope with what it demanded of them. Some felt unable to let down the barriers to a point where they could share all that they wished they could. A woman said:

> There has been a need ... Otherwise I don't think I would have done this if I hadn't have felt that this is beyond words, but at the same time I still don't think I have said everything that ... um ... that I probably would have liked to have said ... [laughter] ... that I am not sure what I would have liked to have said.

Tentative statements such as this provided confirmation that there was depth in experience which extended beyond what is easily reconstructed according to the rules of logic.

As many women as could be recontacted and indicated an interest in hearing about my findings received a follow up visit. For some, a theory relating to multiple structures of consciousness at play in the lived experience of infertility provided useful information. For others, the process attendant to the research relationship had had positive outcomes aside from the provision of a 'theory'. A space in which to explore their experience had activated a personal process. It seemed that the very act of talking about infertility as they perceived it had had some beneficial consequences. The strongest indication of outcome seems to have been a sense of validation or self-affirmation as a result of participation in this research.

Parts of experience which had been denied and split off because of their lack of legitimate status in the dominant narrative have come into a new relationship with the sense of self. In Wilber's terms (1983), *Where It Was, There I Shall Become*. Many women feel better able to embrace experience which they had formally disowned.

A woman said:

> This has helped me to clarify my ideas and explain this experience to myself. Before I began talking to you about the irrational side of it I couldn't define my experience. Now that I know that there is an irrational side, I can understand what I have been through. I can put the things into my head into boxes so that I can better understand what it is about and why it has

> had such an impact on me. This information has given meaning and validity to confusion.

Another said:

> Participation in this research has made me feel a kind of sisterhood. I feel a kind of validation. This is a group you don't want to belong to. Nobody wants to be in this club!

For some, the shift in the understanding of process constituted identification of the subtle aspects of experience which, while present, had previously been overlooked. A Gebsarian (1983) model of multiple structures of consciousness has delineated and refined levels of knowing which were formally more intuitive than discreet. Hence the comment, 'Participation in this research has given me the words to express something that I have been feeling.'

These are personal reflections on how re-viewing has helped to establish new meaning. It may be argued that the willing participants have a new tool at their disposal. These women are no longer at the mercy of 'it' when they have greater consciousness related to their process.

These women were validated in that the particular investigation made experience 'matter'. Process became significant in the creation of meaning. The faith of Gendlin (1978), and Rogers (1961), in organismic functioning is affirmed, in that it was out of what was already present in experience that both parties shaped meaning. In terms of Gebser's model, the potential for aperspectival integrative consciousness was also indicated.

The process of 'learning', in heuristic terms, was an interchange across the boundary of 'being' in the role of subject. Over time, in terms of Moustakas' model of heuristic investigation, dialogue and reflection led to deepening of the question and of awareness. The broad question, 'What is happening in this experience?' was honed to an exploration of 'What is happening to the individual in the moment of exposition of experience?' This culminated in an examination of the operational approach to the function of image in experience as developed by Hillman (1978) and Watkins (1976).

The dominant narrative consigns the experience of infertility liminal status. Identity is always qualified in relation to the fertile other. Via the research dynamic, these women took an opportunity to explore the role of subject anew. In reliving the experience within the psychic boundaries of an open relationship, there was a space in which to re-view and re-own previous experience.

The researcher and the researched met at a point of authentic need and that relationship has been a catalyst to learning. The research experience opened a space for authentic being in both parties. Where women have taken up a voice and expressed their experience 'the way it is', they feel they have validated their experience.

Theoretically, these women have contributed to a new emic exposition of the experience, one which they own. This amounts to a political action in the form of reclamation and legitimisation.

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Chapter 9

An enquiry into writing in the process of transformation

Aileen Treloar Coates

This paper discusses the processes of change revealed through the writing of Glenda, an adult literacy student with whom I worked one-to-one over a twelve month period. Her behaviour in reaching out for change but drawing back, believing she could do nothing while in fact being reasonably competent, making rapid progress then retreating from that progress, and finally reaching a plateau or barrier, is common to many ALBE students. Some manage to resolve the crisis that ensues but many find a reason to cease their education at this point. Glenda displayed this typical behaviour but seemed to manifest each phase in acute form. This phenomenological enquiry attempts to describe her lived experience during that twelve month period through a discussion of her writing.

Any study of adult literacy needs to address issues of both adult education and literacy education. As an adult educator, one needs to heed critical social theory as well as characteristics of adult learners. Literacy education adds further complications since it is concerned with language in its personal and social dimensions. Language theory deals with how language functions for individuals within cultural and social groups and how texts reflect the social and cultural context of both reader and writer. Critical language awareness extends to a study of the power relations between reader and writer and the intentions of the text. There is a further dimension to adult literacy education. Since it is generally assumed that everyone who went to school can read and write adequately, those who cannot frequently perceive themselves to be failed learners. Part of becoming successful readers and writers seems to be a change in self-perception, a move from perceived failed learner to perceived successful learner, so an understanding of processes of personal growth and managing change needs also to be included in any study of adult literacy.

As Glenda's teacher, I came to the teaching-learning situation with a set of assumptions. She, as learner, came with a different set, which she carried with her from school. Glenda believed that she could not write because she could not spell, so she needed to learn the rules of English spelling. I believed that writing came before spelling and, rather than teaching rules for English spelling, my job was to encourage her to take chances and to identify her own spelling mistakes, and then to help her to develop strategies for correcting them with the aid of the dictionary.

A common part of the legacy from school is the belief that it is cheating to use a dictionary. A further legacy from school was her belief that it was my responsibility to teach her; I, however, saw it as my role to help her to take responsibility for her own learning and to become independent as soon as possible.

In this paper I do not propose to discuss the methodology and process of her spelling development but rather to focus on the content of her writing. For reasons of space I have not included all of her writing but the numbering of each piece of writing indicates when it was written. I divided her writing into three phases: the initial period leading up to her crisis; the second phase, consisting of her dream; and the third phase of resolution before she moved on into the mainstream of education. The styles of writing can be described as discussive, descriptive, creative and expressive. I discuss these styles later in this paper.

The process of this research

When we first met, Glenda told me that she could not write a shopping list but, as we talked, it became clear that there had been a time when she was writing. So I asked her to write. The starting activity was to think of a person or place which was important to her: she wrote *Echuca*. Then she was asked to write three words which came to mind and she wrote *river gums, the Murray, and river boats*. I next asked her to choose one of those words and to write what came into her mind. It need not be whole sentences; it could be words or phrases. In the first instance she wrote about the gums and then, when I asked her to have another go, she wrote about the river boats.

1.1 **ECHUCA** (creative)

18/12/86

Echuca

river gums

the Murray

river boats

Old gums. Big. The history of what they have seen through the years. Being burnt out one century after the next then surviving to grow new shoots and regrow for the next fifty years. The strength of massive trunks growing one on top of the other.

The great old river boats of the Murray with the workers who work them up and down from Adelaide to New South Wales, watching for stray logs and narrowing banks around bends. Throwing wood into the thermos to keep steam up.

We then worked on this writing to develop her spelling. That night she could not sleep, so got out of bed to write about something that was making her so angry she was unable to sleep.

1.2 **THE CUSTODY CASE** (discussive)

18/12/86

The verdict of Margaret's custody case was to finish today. I wouldn't believe the family law court could rule that the father was to gain custody of the two pre-school children.

I felt angry and frustrated. This was the second case I now know of where the father who appealed for the children won, after the mother had been looking after them for a year by herself. Previously before the separation I had seen no real involvement from the father with the children.

Gary's thoughts were 'There was more to the case and I didn't know all the facts" but Gary's a closet chauvinist and he has to believe a system works.

Margaret's situation and another were very similar. The women left the marital home with the children because

> *life had become intolerable for them and was affecting the children's psychological well being.*
>
> *After leaving they were harassed by the father at every home they found so they moved a few times to feel safe.*
>
> *With pre-school children to look after and the turmoil they had put the children through they didn't work in a paid position.*
>
> *Meanwhile the father has established a new relationship with a girl a good many years younger who is about to have her first child. Setting up a second family before sorting out the last mess to me shows complete immaturity.*
>
> *The women have shown they are able to get their own lives on a good footing without the aid of emotional black mailing. But the winners of the family court system are the males (fathers and the all male dominated court).*
>
> *The judge ruled the mothers were very confident of looking after the welfare of the children but he couldn't know where she would be in another year nor were they sincerely independent to maintain the children. The father had the backing of both families and a stable home life.*

That was the breakthrough she needed and for many weeks she came with writing she had done at home. The choice of what she wrote was hers and it covered a wide range.

She had many doubts about the approach I was taking and hankered for what she knew from school, so I discussed with her the theoretical framework out of which I was operating.

Then at her fourth lesson her writing began:

1.4 **WRITING TO RULES** (discussive)

8/1/87

> *I have spent hours trying to write a ghastly piece about the ocean and wind. It just wouldn't follow then to my*

> *realisation I was trying for an Introduction, a something I can't remember, a middle, a conclusion and an end, with all the rules about punctuation, full stops and paragraphs as well as spelling the words correctly. What a mess.*

The next week she was still struggling but her focus was on the writing process rather than on the surface features.

4.5 ELUSIVE WRITING (descriptive)

> *Allowing yourself scope to enable you to translate your thoughts in eligible words and sentences. You need an extensive vocabulary, that seems to escape me as soon as a pen becomes into reach.*
>
> *Before pen and paper are visible I seem to be able to weave the language into a meaningful structure. The race begins for you to gather the equipment essential for the process of transferring thought into words before the whole thing has escaped.*
>
> *You are left to struggle on with the gleam of hope it comes to you as you write. Bits and pieces do but most is lost for all time. In a vast space of emptiness with tentacles trying with all their might to grab hold but the expanse seems to become greater and the tentacles smaller. Off the words swim into eternity never to materialise onto the paper in front of you.*
>
> *What's the most frustrating of all is reading back your battle and not being able to recall what that misspelt word is meant to say.*

The main issue that was exercising her was that her daughter was about to start school. In seeking help with her spelling, Glenda was recognising intellectually that her life was about to change. She wrote twice about choosing a school and then, after a visit from an old friend, she wrote *Running Away*.

1.9 **RUNNING AWAY** (expressive: fantasy)

4/2/87

Jane had deposited herself on the front porch turned to give the door a definite bang behind her.

She looked pathetic with all her worldly possessions slung over her shoulder in one small overnight bag. She stood in what she thought the most exquisite dress, a low slung back with sequins in bold colours and patterns running through a background of black material, with shoes to coordinate the garment.

Jane admired herself in the reflection of the window to spot an unseemly thread hanging down. She pulled and as she pulled the hem fell.

Examining this minor tragedy she decided to let the rest of the hem fall. In the process ripped the side. She was flustered now the bottom of her dress looked frayed and torn. Never mind, it will have to do and she still felt quite grand and elegant.

Walking deferentially past the one point two cars in the car port she stopped and rummaged around in the hand bag to extricate the keys. Then violently turned and flung them at the cars and of course missing both. But she walked with positive purpose. Out into the suburban streets with her head held high. Even though people around this neck of the neighbourhood were not accustomed for a dress with sequins that chased after the harsh sunlight so the effect was very special indeed for a perfect summer's day.

With her feet aching and one heel off her shoe Jane still had her face set with a purposeful and defiant look. But as she was trudging along she was wondering when the elusive mist would lift her up into the grandeur and elegance she was seeking.

It didn't arrive. Jane's expectations and presumptions were in tatters. She was in a quandary. Her feet ached.

She had to get rid of the other shoe. Now barefoot Jane was a dismal sight indeed.

Suddenly she picked up her pace. Why hadn't she thought of it before. Off to the theatre with dignity and grace. She will lose herself in the fantasy of the picture screen. Jane arrives with her self importance intact. Only to discover, in her frenzy to leave home and all her worries she hasn't any money in her purse. Jane the independent woman without the finance for a ticket much less an ice cream.

It's a long haul home. Her attire now is far more appropriate as dusk is falling. She picks up her abandoned keys from where they had fallen and lets herself into the house only to be confronted with why she was dressed in that get up which looks pretty ridiculous and we thought you were still in bed.

Finally the day for Melanie to start school arrived.

1.11 **STARTING SCHOOL** (descriptive)

19/2/87

The car's motor revved, coughed and ground as we weaved our way up the mountain heading in the direction of the school in which Melanie was placed to begin her first years of education.

Inside our small mobile cocoon the occupants were tense and extremely quiet, all of us realising that this was the changing point in all our lives.

Every so often Erin let out a few whines from the back seat, that she wanted to go to school as well. Then I would tell her for the thousandth time in the last couple of days she was too little and she and I would play lots of games together which she would respond to by screaming. No I'm not little and I don't want to play with you.

As for Melanie positioned in the front seat next to the driver, a very special privilege, undecided. This decision on my part was for my own self assurance not Melanie's.

Melanie looked apprehensive as she watched the scenery pass by. Then as she looked across to me she would smile as to give me moral support.

As I drove I tried to appear casual with small talk about the school and teachers' names. What a traitor I was feeling. This child who has trusted and believed that I would never put her into any position where she would ever come into any harm still looked towards me for reassurance and I felt frightened for her.

We arrived at the school. Melanie squeezed my hand so tight the circulation had been cut off. Erin held onto Melanie's other hand with complaints from Melanie that Erin was hurting her.

One consolation, the day was only two hours, so not only Melanie could become accustomed to the great upheaval in her life, but Erin and I could come to terms with it.

Erin and I left Melanie in the care of a complete stranger who smiled continually. I assure Melanie that we would be down at the swing and yes, you do have to go to school.

Erin clung to Melanie, venting her strong objection to the separation, while Melanie looked completely lost, her eyes nearly popping out of her head. As the traitor I was I pulled Erin and left Melanie with the smiling teachers, assuring her that these strangers I didn't know at all well would look after her and she accepted this.

While trying to entertain Erin I felt guilty and sick but we managed to endure our two hours together though the play equipment did not enthuse us much.

The longest two hours Erin and I spent together was at a close. We run towards the room. I hoped that Melanie didn't miss us too much.

But no one was there, we had to wait another five minutes until they finished their walk in the forest along the secret

> *path. To find out Melanie would like to stay for the rest of the day. Erin and I talked her out of that idea.*
>
> *We were too traumatised to cope with her away for the rest of the day. Tomorrow was soon enough for us.*

The following weeks were difficult for Glenda and her writing reflected that. Driving her daughter to school each day placed extra pressures on her.

1.14 THE END OF THE WORLD

(expressive; descriptive)

> mid March
>
> *I ran with the warning bell ringing. The idiots have decided to drop the bombs. They're all now safely buried in their fallout shelter with food to last them ten years. To emerge when the time is safe. To look up and say, we will build a new world, just like the other one. I myself, I'm looking for my children then to drive to the most likely place where the main explosion will be.*
>
> *Through Melbourne out to Altona. The traffic will all be coming this way. We'll make it. What I hadn't realised though, every one else opted for hari kari. Trying for survival only to be maimed by the explosion or die by nuclear fallout, starving to death then frozen. It seems no one looked further. We are all heading in the same direction.*
>
> *I became anxious that the traffic was heavy.*
>
> *I woke the alarm bell still ringing screaming "It's late. It's late. Everyone up." No wonder I was dreaming of destroying the family. Yesterday started with trying to pull them out of their beds for them to face me screaming and nagging to dress themselves wash and eat breakfast in haste.*
>
> *Pushing them into the car to fight with the traffic up to Melanie's school; back home running around trying to make beds and straighten the place up a bit before going to Toddler Tumblers with Erin.*

Finding Gary still sound asleep I pushed him out with angry remarks that the bed had to be made. I am tired of this room being a complete mess every day, realising Gary was the mess. He was just lying on the floor as the whirl wind stepped over him.

Throwing Erin back into the car I went back inside to find Gary now asleep on the floor. Irritated as I was I pulled the covers off the bed, threw them on top of him then placed the pillow under his head. Back home to pick up the cheque the postman would have left (Gary's still asleep on the floor) I slam a few doors and fly out.

Down at the Toddlers we played trains and helped the children climb.

Version 2

I ran with warning bells ringing. The idiots have decided to push the button. The politicians are now buried in their fallout shelters with enough food to see them through the big freeze. They hope!

While others are trying to hold their backyard fallout shelters from their neighbours and friends.

I'm looking for my children in a desperate attempt to get to the other side of town where I presume will be the closest point of impact. I want to be certain we are not one of the survivors. To be maimed by the explosion or die slowly by nuclear fallout as people fight for pieces of food, only to be frozen.

What I hadn't realized most people were of the same opinion as I. It looked as if people weren't to take the risk of a fight for survival at whatever cost. We all hoped for hari kari.

We were all racing towards Altona becoming anxious with the chaotic traffic. I'm screaming. "It's late. It's late. Everyone up," as I thump the clock.

No wonder I dream of destroying the family. Yesterday was a disaster and today could shape up much the same.

Arousing the children out of their slumber they stared bleary eyed at the wall. I screamed and nagged them to wash their faces, brush their teeth and dress while I prepared their breakfast.

Pushing them into the car to enter into mortal combat with the streaming masses which weave along a three lane highway towards their places of employment. All are running late it seems.

I envy the people who have the luxury of on tap trains. These people can sit, read the daily newspaper or watch other people without the worry of being crashed into by one of their fellow travellers heading in the same direction.

We arrive safely to hurry Melanie into her class at last. The drive back is never as hair raising.

Running around at home trying to make beds and straighten the place up a bit before taking Erin to Toddler Tumblers to find Gary still asleep. I pushed him out with vague remarks that the bed had to be made and tired of this room being a complete mess every day. Realising Gary was the mess. He was just lying on the floor as the whirl wind stepped over him.

Throwing Erin back into the car I went back inside to find Gary now asleep on the floor. Irritated I pulled the covers off the bed and flung them on top of him then placed the pillow carefully under the head.

Down at Toddlers we played trains, sang songs, jumped about and helped the children to climb.

Back in the hope the postman had been through to enable us to buy some much needed food with the pay cheque (Gary's still asleep on the floor) I slam and crash a few doors on my way out with poor little Erin tagging along behind.

> *Erin and I lug the parcels into the house. Finding Gary having a quiet breakfast and read of the paper. I screamed "I'm late to pick up Melanie. You could at least help bring in the shopping. I haven't had breakfast yet or a cup of tea. And cook something for tea." Then fled leaving Gary staring blankly.*
>
> *We all sit down for tea. Melanie and Erin are too tired to eat. Gary has just had breakfast. Tea went to waste.*
>
> *Now the fight for the hot water begins. Gary wants a shower before work. I want Melanie and Erin bathed and in bed. A solution is worked out. Very quick scrubs for all.*
>
> *Gary's out the door, happy to leave the nut house. I'm reading books to the children, hoping they will be asleep soon. It's not to be. I crawl into an unmade bed with them joining me.*
>
> *All I want is some time to myself, just five minutes, but everyone wants time alone with me.*

She then wrote about a day she and her children spent with her grandfather at the beach where he had lived as a small child.

1.15 **THE GRANDFATHER** (creative)

late March

> *Beyond the horizon all the old man can see is one day fading into the next. It frustrates him to know his body is decaying with old age.*
>
> *For him it's hard to see any future. Only on these occasions with the smell of fresh sea air in his nostrils and the sea spray biting into his skin which seems to revive his tired old bones.*
>
> *That time reels backwards to see himself a small boy again walking along the shoreline with an old woman. Watching the heads for the pilot ship to return with his father on board while the old woman explains as he is*

> *explaining to these small children the secret places where for generations the family has caught fish. These spots would not be fished out even now.*
>
> *He smiles to remember the old woman's information helped him to feed his eleven children in the depression, as it helped her feed his father, aunts, uncles as well as the children of no families of their own in the eighteen nineties.*
>
> *He glorifies his past to the children, as most people who see little hope for the future. Like those who are afraid of what life holds, they reminisce and try to hold back the tide.*
>
> *As people of today glorify the past by trying to preserve buildings and furniture of years gone by when in reality life was a day to day battle for survival.*

She then wrote another piece of argumentative writing before her final creative piece in Phase One after which she could write no more.

1.17 **THE HOUSE PLANT** (creative)

7/4/87

> *Twisting, turning, strangling one another, all reaching out in the vain hope, to find some nourishment from the remains of soil that hasn't been pushed out from the small confines of the pot. Nowhere else to go the roots have weaved their way to the surface in the desperate hope to find a new food source.*
>
> *Once abundant with thick foliage covering the window to draw all the sunlight onto the ever increasing new growth. Taking over a large slice of the lounge room, as all occupants retreat further confining themselves with a clutter of furniture in the backwater somewhere.*
>
> *Now life seems grim for the plant which once took precedence. The owner's enthusiasm has waned and everything else is tired of fighting their way around the entanglement of leaves. A bigger pot would, if it could be found, look*

> *far too bulky and cumbersome. There is no room left. So it stays until the leaves start to yellow and curl, then fall, to become an annoyance.*
>
> *It's not laughing now, it stands outside. As the wind howls through the branches, trying to snap them. For the once proud house plant has now joined the rest of the fauna out in the forever changing climate, as the leaves continue to fall. The roots are too entangled to spread into the new soil surrounding them.*

Each week Glenda came without having done any writing. She suggested several things she would like to write about but could not, 'because she couldn't spell too many words'. This was a return to her original position of 'I can't write because I can't spell'. For a month she struggled, continuing to come to class but unable to write. I tried all manner of approaches without success until finally I remembered that a student from the Council of Adult Education had had a breakthrough when writing his dreams. So I suggested that she write a dream, which she did. It seemed to resolve a whole series of issues, which she then explored in her writing.

2. **THE DREAM** (expressive: dream)

> mid June
>
> *big caravan park - trucks driving*
>
> *living there*
>
> *cannot live the beach but it's close, the smell of shallow water where the tide changes slower leaving a smell of diesel oil petrol rotting seaweed and warm salt water*
>
> *mountains closing in on all sides - a still windless day*
>
> *warm sun*
>
> *I sense I will have to stay here trapped looking for ways to escape but also see how I could make it comfortable*
>
> *I'm living in a large caravan with the door facing towards a big wire fence. There's blue metal stones for five*

> *metres before the high wire fence. This is where a guard box stands at the entrance two gates.*
>
> *The guard checks the trucks which enter when opens the gates. They drive into an enclosure of high wire are checked then allowed to continue through the next set of gates. I can watch this from the doorway.*
>
> *I have no idea why I'm here or the reason for the ten metre high fence right around and the security. All the caravans are big with trucks parked at the sides not a tree or blade of grass only the blue metal stones mud and dust.*
>
> *But for the five metres of stones outside my door there is no space only caravans trucks it looks more like a building site than a place to live.*
>
> *My greatest concern is a way in which to transform the front. How do I shift the stones? Why are they there? To have a very green lawn for children to play in with trees bordering the perimeter to hide the wire and also for a means of shade.*

The next week she wrote again about the stress placed on family life by the long hours and broken shifts her husband was required to work but, whereas before she was angry, now she was sad.

3.1 **THE STRANGER** (discussive)

> *There's a stranger living with us. We speak to him but receive little response. The children try to discuss what happens at school and how they spent the weekend at Nana's.*
>
> *"We went to the football with Tony. Were you there?" they ask in high pitched voices to gain his full attention.*
>
> *"I don't know. What day was that? What day is this?"*
>
> *He pulls himself up and staggers to bed as they begin another day at school.*

> *This man is the children's father but as fathers go they see very little of him. As members of families, with one support parent always on an ever changing merry-go-round of shifts with no Saturdays off and very few conscious Sundays. Their lives rarely coincide.*
>
> *Therefore the merry-go-round worker is alienated from the rest of his family and friends outside the job and realises all responsibility of rearing his children providing weekend outings are left solely up to the home maker. He feels left out of decision making and can say very little about proceedings as they never include him. He is aware his children have lost one of their role models and haven't the predictability and stability which children require to grow up to become responsible adults.*
>
> *As for the spouse, he feels guilty that she's left at home a great deal of the time with little back-up and inconsistent hours and has become isolated. She can never guarantee she will be able to go on outings or neighbourhood gatherings also she is not able to establish herself in work or study.*
>
> *No wonder there's a lot of family breakdown in the police force. The lack of participation in the family is high. Little time to spend with the family must manifest itself at work. Through lack of motivation the quality of work would diminish.*
>
> *They realise their families have become sole parent families.*

Her next piece of writing was fantasy which seems to feature the same young woman as appeared in her first piece of fantasy.

3.2 **WOMAN IN THE OCEAN** (expressive: fantasy)

> *Great clouds congregate, sweeping the sky, blotting out the warm sunlight. Occasionally a small amount of the sun's rays would break through, lighting up the crests of breaking waves, then fading as the waves diminish. The sky becomes darker, one final ray of light fights its way through the clouds to illuminate one individual walking.*

> *All others have scattered to warmer places, but this person walks with purpose and destination.*
>
> *She walks with a lively spring in her step and whirls around on strong muscular legs, to feel the wind in her hair, then skips and runs as she looks across the vast expanse of water. She seems oblivious to the raging storm above.*
>
> *The shoes fill with sand impeding progress, she takes them off while in full stride, then places them above the water line, both pointing towards the sea. Now she can feel the warm sand trickling through her toes, then buries them deep into the sand and kicks up with energetic legs.*
>
> *As the clouds open up to release some of their weight, dark circles appear on dry sand making it stick to her feet. She walks to the edge of the heaving and pulling water, feeling the forces of the great ocean. The bottom of the dress joins the entanglement of water and sand, clinging to her legs and scratching her inner calf muscles. Without losing step she pulls the outer garment off.*
>
> *Now she smiles as the rain drips from her hair. She runs her hand over her dripping body to feel how smooth and agile it is.*
>
> *The sky protests with a flash and clap of rolling thunder which roars with the rolling of waves. The sky once again lights up, just a moment to witness a young strong lady swim out against the waves. The tide has come right in, lifts up her shoes and carries them out.*

This was followed by several vignettes of family life, rueful and funny, and emotionally tranquil.

Then she wrote what could be interpreted as a meditation on water which needs to be read in conjunction with *The Grandfather* and *Woman in the Water.*

3.4 **THE WEIR** (creative)

August

The great mountain ranges sink into this incredible expanse of water. It's so still and silent making everything appear so tranquil.

Walking across the weir, comparing each side; all this water held back by one great man made construction. Even though you would have liked to have seen this country in its natural undisrupted state, you really have to admire the genius which has gone into holding back the flow of nature, no matter how often you return.

There's a feeling of disappointment, that as far as you can see humanity has turned a once lively river, with streams all pushing to become a part of a growing force, breaking through rocks and cutting a path across the land, and the hurry to meet the ocean.

The ocean itself has a feeling of growing excitement. It can't be tamed, it will go on for eternity clashing and banging, shifting sand, shorelines and rocks, full of energy and life, which makes this beauty a little sad.

We lean on the rail, watching the clouds reflected off the dark green water, as they slowly drift by. Five boys with excited voices break the tranquillity, as they rip off their clothes, stand on the rail, to throw themselves in.

The reflections of the clouds disperse, ripples appear. Echoes vibrate through the surrounding mountain and the water once again feels its old self, bubbling and shaking with the energy of its previous life. The boys climb and once again fall.

People start to watch as others consider whether they could jump and swim to shore just for the sensation of falling, then breaking through the water as it slows your fall, then the quietness as you make your way to the surface for air.

> *It's not completely tame. There's still a risk. This peaceful mass of water, if not treated with some respect could swallow you.*

In her final piece of writing she seemed to bring together several of the issues with which she had been grappling during our time together.

3.6 **MOVING ON** (discussive)

> *I'm so tired of hearing the same statement. "You'll be able to go to work soon." What do these people think I've been doing. It might not have been with paid, award conditions or recognition, but to be seen as worth while in this society does one have to be in paid employment?*
>
> *When the standard reply is not responded to they are astounded. No, I'm not rushing off to paid employment each day, then having to run around once again in my lunch hour, for food so others can have dinner when they come home. I'm having a well earned break for four hours every day for several years. Time to myself, to think, read, sit about, anything I want to do.*
>
> *No-one should feel compelled to move into paid employment as soon as the children start school. There seems to be more work at this time than any other, reassuring them, helping them with school, and building up their confidence.*
>
> *In an ideal society no-one should be subjected to getting up early every morning to battle their way to work, then after eight hours battle home again, to work into the night maintaining the children's welfare and the home, one therefore becoming too tired for thought or conversation.*
>
> *Ask any person if they are looking forward to forty-five years of going to work for someone else and you could get the same reply. That's why I wonder if when trying to establish equality with men we become misguided in our approach. Women shouldn't want to be replicas of the male but an improvement.*

> *As women have established themselves as intelligent and responsible human beings who need no help from their male counterparts to achieve their ambitions we should be working towards a quality of life style not quantity. Equal time between pleasure and employment should be established, there should be time for domestic work, paid work, human involvement with one another and self time.*
>
> *But in reality? Yes! I will be returning to the paid work force. Yes, I'm bowing to the pressure of having to justify myself. And yes, I would like to be independent financially from others.*

By this stage Glenda was ready to move on.

She enrolled in a TAFE Associate Diploma in Business Studies. She used me as a counsellor from time to time but mainly she rang to tell me that she had gained another Distinction or High Distinction. She also got a job as an office manager and was encouraged to stay after a restructure and takeover.

Discussion and analysis of data

In my initial approach to the data I began by identifying themes, looking for recurring images or topics such as family or nature but none of these approaches opened up the data in the way that I wished. Johnson gave a lead:

> We may picture two conduits that run from the unconscious to the conscious mind. The first conduit is the faculty of dreaming; the second is the faculty of imagination. Dreaming and imagination have one special quality in common: their power to convert the invisible forms of the unconscious into images that are perceptible to the conscious mind. . . . It (the unconscious) emits a continual stream of energetic pulses that find their way to the conscious mind in the forms of feelings, moods and, most of all, the images that appear in the imagination. . . . Imagination, properly understood, is a channel through which this material flows to the conscious mind. To be even more accurate, imagination is a transformer that converts the invisible material into images the conscious mind can perceive. (Johnson 1986:21-22)

So, in order to try to make sense of Glenda's experience, I began to take account of the metaphors she was using. It seemed that, if I could understand more of those images, themes and moods, then I would be able to understand more of Glenda's experience.

It was when I began to work with dream analysis methodology, using an adaptation of the approach used by Ullman (1979) in which he encourages dream workers to explore all the associations they have with the images being used, that I was able to move below the surface. Both Ullman (1979) and Miller (1981) suggest that symbol systems are common to members of particular cultures. So, since Glenda and I both share the same Anglo-Celtic Australian background, it was reasonable for me to explore her metaphors and images in her absence. (I would have preferred to work collaboratively with her but this was not possible.)

Patterns began to emerge of the topics she wrote about, the images she used, the different styles of writing. I became aware of her moods and her emotional state. Finally I noticed that her writing could be discussed within a framework of archetypal images.

> The idea is not that myths describe or prescribe actions. They do not symbolize univocal behaviours. Rather they express articulately in ways that we often are not able, our feelings or thoughts, our consciousness or sense, concerning any behaviour. (Miller 1982, p.16)

The archetypal images I have used are those of the Greco-Roman tradition, which is one of the bases of Western tradition. Miller (1982, p.33) argues that it is necessary for us to understand the symbol-systems that are effective in Western consciousness and behaviour because they are the ideas that have formed our culture and consciousness.

Bolen, working with the Greek goddesses, divides them into three main groups: the virgin goddesses, Artemis, Athena, and Hestia; the vulnerable goddesses, Hera, Demeter, and Persephone; and the alchemical (or transformative) goddess, Aphrodite (Bolen 1985, p.16-17). These goddesses, all of whom have both positive and negative attributes, represent patterns of female behaviour across millennia. They lived, as we do, in a patriarchal society and adapted to it in various ways. One of the questions that Glenda seems to be addressing is the role of women and men in the modern world.

Different strands are present in Glenda's writing with first one goddess and then another taking centre stage. Identifying some of the archetypal images present in Glenda's writing alerted me to elements of her behaviour of which I was otherwise unaware. It was helpful to explore these patterns by means of a series of tables. (See Tables 1-3).

As I have said, Glenda's process of change could be described as having three phases: an initial burst of energy and productivity; her writing block resolved by her dream; and the final phase of resolution. The writing itself can be roughly classified as taking place at four levels which I have called discussive, descriptive, creative and expressive. Examples of each style have been included. In her discussive writing she is writing of what she knows she knows, the things she has been thinking about for some time, and events in which she has been involved. Her descriptive writing describes events and places and is largely based on family experience. Imagination is often at work in her shaping of this writing and her descriptive writing was often done when she was disturbed or unsettled and moving to some new level of understanding. Her creative writing was more imaginative still. She seems to use her creative writing to find out what it is she knows but does not yet know consciously. Her expressive writing - two short stories, a dream fragment and a dream - seems to come from her deepest levels of knowing.

During the first phase, discussion of issues is by far the most prevalent style of writing with recurring themes. She knows she is concerned about power and powerlessness, masculine dominance, and issues of access and equity. She can see how these issues impinge on her life and the lives of others and the implication is that society ought to be otherwise. This stage of Glenda's writing exemplifies the stance of critical reflection advocated by Brookfield (1991) and Mezirow (1991). However, her development towards the end of Phase One, the climax in Phase Two, and the resolution in Phase Three would suggest that more is taking place than critical reflection alone.

Her dream of the *Caravan Park* was the turning point. I found it difficult to work with but what is certain is that, before she wrote it, she was quite blocked and unable to write, and afterwards she was changed. An analysis of her writing shows that not only was she writing freely again but her emotional state changed from one of continuing anger, frustration and anxiety to acceptance, exhilaration, calmness and finally energetic purpose. I noted a further change also which I have described as orientation, by which I mean whether she responded to the world with a positive or negative mien.

On her first evening she wrote in a style I have described as creative. She did not write in this style again for four months until she was again under stress, when the change in her writing from discussive to expressive (*Running Away; The End of the World*), descriptive (*Starting School*) and creative (*Grandfather; The House Plant*) showed that she was nearing a personal crisis. Of her last eight pieces of writing, one is a dream, one is fantasy (*Woman in the Ocean*), three are creative (*The Weir*), and two are discussive (*The Stranger* and *Moving On*). That is, the balance of the final weeks is almost exactly the reverse of her early weeks. In the beginning she was writing of what she knew; in the final weeks she is writing to discover what she knows.

Quite late in my own writing process, as I worked with the archetypal patterns present in Glenda's writing and became increasingly aware of the patterns of her emotions and her negative and positive orientation to the world, I became conscious of the role of the *animus*.

Neville describes the shadow and *animus* as 'elusive', merging 'into one another and across the boundaries between conscious and unconscious, personal and collective' (1989, p.127). In discussing Glenda's writing I find myself so moving between shadow and *animus* that it seems more sensible to discuss the two together, noting, however, that the *animus* is but one aspect of the shadow:

> The shadow is a kind of alter ego, split off from the conscious ego-mind and sentenced to live in the unconscious. Usually the shadow contains qualities and traits, both negative and positive, that are a natural part of the ego-personality. But the ego, for one reason or another, has either failed to assimilate these qualities or has repressed them outright. Sometimes the qualities in the shadow seem embarrassing or primitive to the ego. One doesn't want to admit that they belong to one. Sometimes the shadow has tremendous positive strengths that the ego won't claim because it would mean either too much responsibility or a shattering alteration of one's puny self-image. (Johnson 1986, p. 50).

This last attribute is frequently present in Glenda's writing. She often showed unwillingness to accept herself as a skilful writer. Her comment about her inadequate vocabulary, when she suggested that, if she could not spell the words, then she could not have been using many of them, is a case in point - as it was again when she said she could not write to the Anti-Discrimination Board because she would not know the words.

In both of Glenda's fantasy writings there is evidence of *animus*. In the first, *Running Away*, it is negative; in the second, *Woman in the Ocean*, it is positive. When Jane returns home at the end of *Running Away* (1.9), the manner in which she was greeted exemplified the negative *animus*:

> She picks up her abandoned keys from where they had fallen and lets herself into the house only to be confronted with why she was dressed in that get up which looks pretty ridiculous and we thought you were still in bed.

On the other hand, in *Woman in the Ocean* (3.2), she rejoices in her body and its strength and throws off the trapping of modern Western culture, the clinging dress and the high heeled shoes, and with great energy dances and kicks and swims out into the waves. Her final piece of writing is full of energy and plans for the future. Moods and emotions, and energy levels, are commonly seen as indicators of *animus* activity. There is a distinct pattern in Glenda's writing. Before her dream she was, with two exceptions, angry, frustrated and generally negative and depressed; afterwards she was calm and then energised. A Mexican story told and discussed by Estes (1992, p.302) gives some further insights. In this story a grieving woman throws her two small children into a river where they drown. When she dies, she is unable to enter heaven until she has dragged the river to recover the souls of her children. Estes takes the river as the river of life, which may be either clean, pure and creative, or poisoned and sterile. Estes observes that when women are creative they are filled with energy (*op.cit.*, p.304) but:

> when a woman's animus is taken up with psychic manufacturing of a negative sort, a woman's output dwindles as her confidence and creative muscle wane. (op.cit., p.315).

This describes much of Glenda's experience. When we initially began to work together she was successfully developing as a writer and a speller and had great energy for the writing she was doing. This may have been because, in coming to classes, she was taking positive action. Then, after Melanie started school, she became increasingly depressed, even to the point of dreaming of killing her children. Finally, she was unable to write at all. Estes describes situations very similar to this:

> Women in this predicament tell me they 'cannot see a way out' of their so-called writer's block, or for that matter the cause of it. Their animus is sucking all the oxygen out of the river, and they feel 'extremely tired' and suffer 'tremendous loss of energy,' can't seem to 'get going' and feel 'held back by something' (op.cit., p.315).

There are echoes in Estes' discussion of the river of Glenda's dream in which she is surrounded by sterility, death and decay. Cut off from the ocean, which in any case was stagnant and polluted, and seemingly unable to escape, she assessed her situation and planned what action she could take. In this she was showing the initiative, courage and objectivity which von Franz sees as characteristics of positive ***animus***. Von Franz (1978, p.206) suggests that there are four phases in ***animus*** development. The first is mere physical power. This may be what Glenda was showing when she wrote about the trucks coming and going from the compound. The second phase shows 'initiative and the capacity for planned action', which she demonstrated in her final piece of writing. 'In the third phase the ***animus*** becomes the "word," often appearing as a professor.' Glenda's next move was to enrol at the TAFE college. In 'the fourth manifestation the ***animus*** is the incarnation of meaning', giving the woman invisible inner support that compensates for her outer softness. In her final writing Glenda is moving towards making sense of our society and feeling towards some new order. 'Women shouldn't want to be replicas of the male but an improvement.' (***Moving On:*** 3.6)

Implications for practice

It would seem that Glenda's writing was a key element in her change. As I worked with it, it became increasingly apparent that an important factor had been that she wrote as she wished. I believe that, had she not written as she did, she would have continued to know only those things she wrote about in discussive mode during her first phase. She knew she knew those things but it was in her writing that she was able to explore what she did not know she knew.

The change in her styles of writing which took her to increasing depths of her consciousness enabled her to have access to those parts of her knowing that had hitherto been inaccessible. My study of her writing suggests that it was the writing in which she explored her unconscious processes that was catalytic in bringing about the changes in her life.

Neville (1994) makes a distinction between incremental and transformative learning. The developments in her spelling strategies could be seen as falling into the category of skills and behaviours, things she could do, that is, incremental learning. However her writing took her deeper than that to issues of her identity, to the deepest awareness of who she is; that is, it became transformative learning. While she shrank from change at this level, there nevertheless seemed to be some force from within that impelled her onward into further change. Her writing supports the claim that she was undergoing processes of individuation (von Franz 1978), of fulfilling her potential, of becoming more of what she was. Her creative and expressive writing in particular seem to be describing an integration of positive aspects of the ***animus*** and a rejection of the negative influences it was exerting on her.

I believe that Glenda's experience has serious implications for adult literacy and basic education curriculum. The present Victorian Certificate of General Adult Education is based on a framework which divides writing into four domains: Writing for Practical Purposes, Writing for Public Debate, Writing for Knowledge and Writing for Self Expression, with the more functional aspects of writing being more highly favoured.

Glenda's experience of rapid progress followed by a plateau is common to many adult literacy students. Case studies by Grant (1985, p.1987, in press) suggest that fear of independence may be one of the factors influencing this behaviour. Glenda's experience, as revealed in her writing, suggests that this may indeed be so, but I think this study of Glenda's writing takes our understanding further in that it reveals what were for her the elements of change that she was finding particularly challenging.

It is my custom to include experience in personal writing in the Graduate Diploma course at La Trobe University, *Learning Reading and Writing*. Each year the writing experience is found by class members to be a therapeutic experience, which does not mean it is without pain. Every year on the last day of the course class members read a piece of writing they have written especially for that occasion and every year more than one is unable to continue and asks a class member to read for her. Tears may be shed during the writing process also. If, as Johnson says, dreams and imagination are the transformers converting the invisible material from the unconscious into images the conscious mind can perceive, and these images are linked to feelings and moods, then any transformative writing experience is likely to be signalled by strong emotion. I do not believe that this is dangerous so long as the writers are free to choose what they will write about and are able to stop when they wish. Students frequently say, 'I started to write about something but then I did not want to pursue that, so I did something else.' These are adults living adult lives that are not free from emotional conflict or complexity. They have well established protection mechanisms which they use when they need to. .

Adult education in general and adult literacy education in particular has the power to transform lives. Writing for self expression, therapeutic writing, personal writing, has an important role to play and ought to be encouraged. However, for that to happen, I believe that teacher education needs to encourage the experience of personal writing so that teachers have experienced the pleasure and benefit of personal writing and can understand what it is they are asking their students to do.

Table 1

NAME	STYLE	THEME	ARCHETYPAL IMAGE	EMOTION or MOOD	ORIENTATION
Echuca	creative	continuity	Great Goddess	strength endurance	+
The Custody Case	discussive	masculine dominance	Demeter Apollo	anger frustration	-
The Party	discussive	masculine dominance	Aphrodite Apollo	anger frustration	-
Writing to Rules	discussive	masculine dominance	Apollo	frustration	-
Elusive Writing	descriptive	masculine dominance	Athena	frustration	-
Thinking about School	discussive	powerlessness	Apollo	anxiety	-
Choosing a School	discussive		Demeter Athena	anxiety	-
Old Friend	discussive	equality	Puer Athena	happiness	+
Running Away	expressive: fantasy		Aphrodite Puer - Apollo	anger defeat	-
Holiday Treats	discussive	access equity	Apollo	anger	-
Starting School	descriptive		Demeter Persephone	anxiety	-
The Butchered Tree	descriptive		Great Goddess	anger frustration	-
Nothing	descriptive		Senex	depression	-
The End of the World	expressive: dream descriptive	powerlessness	Aphrodite Ares - Hera Senex	anger frustration	-
Grandfather	creative	continuity	Senex Puer	depression	-
Writing for Argument	discussive		Apollo Athena	anger frustration	-
The House Plant	descriptive		Hestia Apollo Great Goddess	depression	-

Table 2

NAME	STYLE	THEME	ARCHE-TYPAL IMAGE	EMOTION or MOOD	ORIENT-ATION
The Dream	expressive: dream		Psyche Apollo Great Goddess	subdued	+/-

Table 3

NAME	STYLE	THEME	ARCHE-TYPAL IMAGE	EMOTION or MOOD	ORIENT-ATION
The Stranger	discussive	family life	Hera	sadness acceptance	+/-
Woman in the Ocean	expressive: fantasy	freedom	Aphrodite	exhiliration	+
Breakfast in Bed	creative	family life	Demeter	humour	+
The Weir	creative	nature	Psyche Hestia Aphrodite	calmness	+
Gastro	creative	family life	Hestia Demeter	calmness	+
Moving on	discussive	women in the world	The Hero	assertive energetic	+

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Part Three

Phenomenology

Chapter 10

The difficulties of using phenomenology: A novice researcher's experience

Lisa Catherine Ehrich

Introduction

This paper is an honest and reflective account of my journey of coming to understand phenomenology. This journey has been an arduous one, and it is by no means over. Along the way, I have grappled with a number of complex issues and dilemmas. Some of these dilemmas have been reflected in four key questions which I will address in this paper.

1. What is the relationship between the philosophy and the methodology of phenomenology?
2. How do I 'do' phenomenology?
3. Why did I feel 'guilty' early in the conceptualisation of the research because I chose phenomenology and in the process turned away from other research traditions?
4. How much credibility does phenomenology have amongst my peers in the field of education?

I am still in the process of working through these questions, particularly Question 2, as I approach the data analysis phase of my doctoral study. This paper is an attempt to share my findings and thoughts on phenomenology. Before addressing the first question which explores the relationship between the philosophy and the methodology of phenomenology, some background information on what is phenomenology is necessary.

Background

> *Phenomenology has become a broad stream with many currents.*
>
> (Chamberlin 1974:127).

To date, there is confusion about the meaning of phenomenology and part of the confusion can be attributed to the fact that the term phenomenology has been used so widely. Phenomenology has been referred to as a philosophy, a paradigm, a methodology, and equated with qualitative methods of research and naturalistic enquiry (Patton 1990, p.68).

Phenomenology had its origins in the European philosophical tradition. It emerged from the philosophy of Husserl, a late 19th century German mathematician and philosopher. Phenomenology has undergone some expansions and refinement since the time of Husserl, and today there are a number of schools of thought within it. While Husserl's phenomenology has been labelled 'transcendental' (Sexton-Hesse 1983, p.5), other examples of branches of phenomenological philosophy include existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (Tesch 1984, pp.1-2). Rather than distinguish the nuances amongst the three key phenomenological philosophies, a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's 'phenomenological method' will be provided. Merleau-Ponty's four 'celebrated themes' (1962, p.viii), characteristic of the phenomenological method and common to streams within the practice of phenomenology, provide an entrance through which phenomenology can be accessed. Each of these will be reviewed briefly.

Description

The aim of phenomenology is the description of phenomena rather than explanation. A phenomenon includes anything that appears or presents itself; these may range from physical objects to thoughts or concepts. Phenomenology demands that things are described in the way one experiences them. This means a turning away from scientific knowledge and returning to the 'things themselves' (Husserl, in Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.vii). The consequence of returning to the things themselves (*Zu den Sachen selbst*) is to place a person's unique experience at the centre of any investigation, since all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is gained from an individual viewpoint (Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp.viii-x).

Reduction

A simple way of viewing the reduction is to think of it as a process where phenomenology requires taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions about phenomena be temporarily suspended or bracketed. The reason for this suspension or bracketing of the phenomena is to ensure that theoretical prejudices do not contaminate the experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This ensures that 'the things themselves' can be returned to. Husserl's phrase rests on the principle that it is 'living human beings who bring schemas and frameworks into being and not the reverse' (van Manen 1982, p.297).

Essences

An essence is simply the core meaning of any given phenomenon that makes it what it is.

The search for essences, essential themes or essential relationships as they have been called, involves the exploration of phenomena by using the process of free imagination, intuition and reflection. Free variation is used to determine if a particular feature of an essence is essential to it (Spiegelberg 1975, p.63). According to Spiegelberg (1975, p.64):

> ...essential insight requires that on the basis of such variation we determine what is essential or necessary and what is merely accidental or contingent.

Once a description is given, the phenomenologist tries to understand the essential structure of the lived experience. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.xiv) argued that arriving at the essence or essential structure of the phenomenon is not the final step, but is a way in which we can understand the relationships of the experience.

Intentionality

Intentionality is an important concept to consider in terms of Husserl's phenomenology. It refers to consciousness and asserts that individuals are always conscious of something (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p.xviii). Intentionality is the total meaning of the object (e.g. idea, the process, a person, etc.) which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single perspective (Chamberlin 1974, p.129).

Husserl used the two concepts *noesis* and *noema* to reveal intentionality of consciousness. According to Husserl (in Sanders 1982, p.354), intentionality referred to the correlation between *noema* and *noesis*, both of which lead to the interpretation of an experience. *Noema* is the objective statement of behaviour or the experience, while *noesis* is a subjective reflection of the objective statement (Sanders 1982, p.357). Together, the *noema* and *noesis* lead each person to interpret an experience in a unique way.

To summarise, the four features - description, reduction, essence and intentionality - are said to be common themes within phenomenological philosophy.

1. The relationship between the philosophy and methodology of phenomenology

At this point, it is important to note that while Merleau-Ponty (1962) used the expression, 'the phenomenological method', he was not referring to a methodology or technique for carrying out research in phenomenology. The phenomenological method he proposed was a way of understanding phenomenology from a philosophical orientation. The dilemma I faced as a researcher was the question of what is the relationship between the philosophy of phenomenology and its methodology (if indeed there is a single methodology). To try to address this question, I consulted some of the research which used phenomenology. I have categorised studies into three main groups: those written at a philosophical and theoretical level; those utilising the 'phenomenological method', ie studies employing common themes of phenomenology and applying them to data; and those which have interpreted the 'phenomenological method' by devising procedural steps to follow (Giorgi 1985a; Oiler in Munhall *et al.* 1986, p.79). Each of these will be discussed briefly.

A. Philosophical and theoretical phenomenology

Some researchers (Stanage 1987; Mitchell 1990) have used the philosophical principles of phenomenology to develop their understanding of a particular concept or research area. For Mitchell's investigated the phenomenology of educational leadership utilising Husserl's key ideas to arrive at a unique way of understanding educational leadership. As he stated (Mitchell 1990, p.6), he used phenomenology as a philosophical tool to help him focus on the *is-ness* of educational leadership. In Stanage's (1987) work, he presented phenomenology as a useful way for understanding the concerns central to adult educators. The approach of both of these writers can be categorised as a phenomenological study which utilised theoretical and philosophical principles of phenomenology to illuminate a particular area of research. Both studies were written at a theoretical level and neither involved subjects directly.

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B. Phenomenological method

The problem I grappled with for a long time was how to apply philosophical phenomenology to problems or issues in educational research. Husserl, for one, did not outline the specific applications of phenomenology for research problems; he saw that phenomenology as a philosophy was a pure and theoretical discipline (McDuffie 1988, p.52). Nor did Merleau-Ponty, for that matter. Three research studies that will be reviewed here are Sanders' (1981), Mott's (n.d.) and McDuffie's (1988), as all of these used phenomenology as the methodology for their study.

Sanders (1981) interviewed 10 professors to investigate their teaching role perceptions. She utilised in-depth oral history interviews to reveal the essences of their perceptions. While she did not claim to use Merleau-Ponty's four themes, each of these themes was alluded to in the data analysis section of her thesis. The presentation and analysis of the data chapter discussed the essential themes which emerged from the perceptions of the interviewees.

McDuffie (1988) in his study drew upon Husserl's notion of transcendental subjectivity and applied it to significant events in his classroom which occurred over a period of five years. He then developed a methodology appropriate to exploring these events.

Mott's (n.d.) research was based on interviews with 12 adult educator practitioners, as well as observations, participant research journals and other documentary evidence in order to explore the role of intuition in reflective adult education. The data were analysed concurrently through the constant comparative method devised by Glaser and Straus (1967). From there, her analysis focused on uncovering thematic categories.

All three studies were using phenomenology as their methodology; yet there was great variation in the way that each interpreted the task and analysed the data. Their work was underpinned by the theoretical principles of phenomenology; yet the path they travelled to discover the 'essences'was different. In Mott's (n.d.) case, no discussion of steps in the analysis was provided. Another concern with her paper was that she used phenomenological concepts, such as '*epoché*', 'reduction', 'bracketing'; yet in the Findings and Discussion section, no discussion was made of how she applied these terms to the study at hand. The other two studies, however, provided a more systematic approach to analysing the data; yet their approach was not the same.

As a novice researcher, I became quite confused. I did not want to write a purely philosophical thesis, such as those provided by Mitchell (1990) and Stanage

(1987). At the same time, I did not feel I had the confidence or knowledge to apply the theoretical principles of phenomenology to a research study. There was much I did not understand. While I had three examples of studies to refer to, i.e. McDuffie 1988, Mott n.d. and Sanders 1981, I still felt uncertain as to how to arrive at essential themes so that the study was phenomenological first and foremost and not some other type of qualitative research. Months of searching led me to a body of literature by a group of phenomenological psychologists, i.e. Giorgi (1971, 1985a, 1985b), van Kaam (1966), and Colaizzi (1978), who explained how to apply the phenomenological method to concrete research in a systematic way. It is to this third type of phenomenological literature that I now turn.

C. Phenomenological psychology: the bridge between philosophy and methodology

Due to the ambiguous nature of 'how' to apply the phenomenological method to concrete research, a number of researchers, e.g. Giorgi (1971, 1985a), van Kaam (1969), Colaizzi (1978), have offered specific interpretations of it. When I discovered that a group of researchers had made clear linkages from the philosophy to the methodology, I immediately saw a bridge on which I was able to travel. The work of Giorgi will be examined here since he was instrumental in translating phenomenological psychology to a rigorous and legitimate methodology.

Giorgi's (1971) work arose from his belief that psychology had to develop its own methods and procedures which did not rely upon the natural sciences. Up until that time, psychology had been dominated by the natural sciences. He turned to the theoretical insights of existential phenomenological philosophy and endeavoured to apply these to the study of psychology. Due to the complexity of applying the phenomenological method to research, he translated the phenomenological perspective into a scientific methodology. He felt this was necessary because the 'phenomenological method' as articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962) was written at a theoretical level and was thus ambiguous for research.

Giorgi (1985a, p.47-52) analysed Merleau-Ponty's four criteria of the phenomenological method and expressed these in a way that illuminated phenomenological psychology. These four themes will now be explored:

Description. The first and most crucial point Giorgi (1985a, p.47) made is that when one moves from philosophy to psychology, one moves from self to others. In phenomenological psychology, the descriptions come from the subjects, as the subjects are those whose experiences are sought. He argued that this move is non-phenomenological in the true sense because phenomenology strictly interpreted depends on self evidence and the self.

Reduction. In phenomenological philosophy, the philosopher usually begins by bracketing her or his presuppositions before embarking upon the description. In phenomenological psychological research, however, this is not possible. Subjects describe phenomena within the natural attitude. The point Giorgi made here is that naive descriptions are accepted by subjects, and the reduction occurs when the researcher begins to analyse the descriptions (Giorgi 1985a, p.49).

Intentionality. This criterion pertaining to phenomenological philosophy is the notion of intentionality. Just as consciousness is always intended toward an object, in psychology, behaviour is seen as intentional and always directed towards a situation. Unlike pure consciousness, the body is given credence and behavioural descriptions involve the body (Giorgi 1985a, p.51).

Essences. Giorgi (1985a, p.50) argued that the search for essences in phenomenological psychology is similar to the search for essences within phenomenology. Free variation is still used to uncover the 'invariants' of the phenomenon. The main difference is that in phenomenological philosophy the philosopher seeks universal invariants, while in phenomenological psychology the psychologist seeks general essences which are context-related, rather than universal. The essences or structures which are uncovered in the descriptions are general, because the meanings arrived at are more able to change due to their relationship to contexts or situations.

All of Giorgi's points are significant and have implications for the methodology he proposed. Giorgi's methodological procedure has been used in a variety of psychological circles and has concentrated on clinical, social, psychological, and systematic psychological inquiries (Giorgi, Fischer and von Eckartsberg 1971, p.xii).

In more recent years, qualitative nursing research (Burns and Grove 1993) has turned to Giorgi's methodology to investigate particular phenomena. Utilising Giorgi's steps of data analysis will be the focus of Question 2 which asks, 'How do I do phenomenology?'

2. How do I do phenomenology?

We can best understand phenomenology by 'doing it' (Van Hesteren in Dudley 1992, p.333). More easily said than done!

The response to the previous question established that the work of Giorgi and other phenomenological psychologists bridged the chasm between the philosophy and the methodology. Following on with Giorgi's work, he proposes four key steps to follow when analysing data. Before discussing the data analysis steps, however, it is important to allude to some of the different types of data collection sources available to the researcher who is phenomenologically oriented.

Data Collection

According to Stone (1979, p.9), there are three main types of data collection used in phenomenological studies. These include: in-depth interviews; documentary evidence; and case study analysis.

Patton (1990, p.70) conceptualised collecting data in two key ways. Either the researcher can focus on what people experience (and hence use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon under study personally), or the researcher can opt to experience the phenomenon, which would mean that he or she would need to be involved in participant observation. According to Patton, either approach is legitimate for a phenomenological study.

When reviewing two studies which used Giorgi's methodology, data were collected in two different ways. Parse, Coyne and Smith (1985) in one research study asked the subjects to write a description of a situation in which they experienced a particular phenomenon. In another study which utilised a phenomenological approach, interviews were conducted with the subjects (Subandi 1993).

Data Analysis

Giorgi's (1985b, pp.11-19) four main steps for data analysis will be briefly reviewed.

1. *Reading of the entire description to get a sense of the whole statement.*

   This involves the researcher reading and re-reading the narratives from either the transcribed tape recordings or the written work by the subjects. These narratives describe the human experiences and consciousness of the participants in the study.

2. *Discrimination of meaning units within a psychological perspective and focused on the phenomenon being researched.*

This step involves the researcher breaking down the text into more manageable units and involves the researcher discriminating 'meaning units' with a focus on the phenomenon (Giorgi 1985b, p.11). A meaning unit is simply made up of words or phrases which express clearly a meaning which distinguishes the meaning unit from other meaning units. At this stage, the subject's language is not altered in any way.

3. *Transformation of subject's everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated.*

To arrive at these transformations, the process of reflection and imaginative variation needs to occur. It is here that the researcher asks, 'What is essential in this meaning unit?'. Imaginative variation is the process which the researcher employs to determine what is essential and what is accidental. As Giorgi (1985b, p.17) stated, the intent is to 'arrive at the general category of *going through* the concrete expression'.

4. *Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a consistent statement of the structure of the experience. This would include:* (4a) *a synthesis of situated structural descriptions, and* (4b) *a synthesis of general structural descriptions.*

Here the researcher synthesises the insights within the meaning units into a consistent description of the structure of the event. Step 4a is a synthesis of the situated structural descriptions and is concerned with the concrete subject and specific situation, while Step 4b moves away from the specifics to get to the 'most general meaning of the phenomenon' (Giorgi 1985b, p.20). In other words, to arrive at a general structural description will involve synthesising each of the subject's specific structural descriptions into a general structural description. As Giorgi (1985b, p.19) stated, it is necessary that all of the meaning units are implicitly contained in the general structure. The final stage - Step 4b - is very important in a phenomenological study because it recognises the commonalities across the sample of subjects' experience of the phenomena. While an assumption within phenomenological studies is that individuals are unique and have unique experiences, phenomenological studies also emphasise an examination of the experiences of a number of subjects so that the essences or essential structures can emerge.

3. Why did I choose phenomenology?

Neophyte researchers are confronted with a myriad of challenges and decisions as they embark on a journey into understanding a particular research tradition and the subsequent attempt to apply it to a particular research problem. In my case, phenomenology was the chosen methodology and overarching theoretical framework for my doctoral study. Arriving at this decision, however, was not a simple and straightforward process. An initial difficulty facing me was the smorgasbord of methodologies confronting all researchers who are intending to do a study from the 'qualitative' school of research. Examples of qualitative methodologies include: phenomenology, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, symbolic interactionism, interpretive or hermeneutic inquiry, grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry and ethnography. Each of these approaches has its own intellectual history and methods of collecting data and can be distinguished from the others (Patton 1991, p.389).

As a neophyte researcher, I did not set out to use phenomenology. I had always been attracted to the critical social science paradigm. Carr and Kemmis (1986) put forward the critical paradigm as one which goes beyond the subjective understandings of the interpretive paradigm. One of its assumptions is that people's interpretations may be ideologically distorted.

As Merriam (1991) outlines, the aim of critical research is empowerment brought about through action. Drawing on Comstock's (1982) work, she outlines the steps the researcher follows in this perspective. Through dialogue, the researcher tries to understand the life-world of a group which expresses a need or concern to be addressed. From this, the researcher constructs models of relations between social conditions and the subjects' actions, and then attempts to educate the subjects so that action can be aimed at changing the social conditions (Merriam 1991, p.54). This type of participatory research has been used widely with social movements in the Third World (Merriam 1991, p.56) and a prime example is the work of the adult educator, Paulo Freire (1970).

While this type of paradigm appealed because in theory it meant change and breaking down the institutional barriers and structures which reproduce social inequalities and oppressive ideologies (Carr and Kemmis 1986), I wondered whether I had the political and social skills to enlighten a group of subjects about the social constraints facing them and eventually lead them to take action with the aim of emancipation. As my area of interest was educational leadership, I was faced with the dilemma of how to go about a truly emancipatory research project.

For months I struggled with a research project within my research area that could be approached. At this time, I came across a reading by Sanders (1982) where she argued that phenomenological studies have relevance to organisational research. Her argument was compelling and she provided an overview of the features of phenomenology and discussed significant issues in data collection and data analysis. Further reading in the area interested me and I realised that to 'understand' the meanings and life-world of my participants is an end in itself. Before I decide to play a small or big part in enabling others to change their world, I believe that I should understand their world. I also realised that to choose phenomenology is not to be a traitor to other research traditions. No research paradigm has all of the answers; our knowledge will always be incomplete.

Dudley (1992, p.328) argued that:

> ...one's method must be congruent both with one's world-view and the subject to be studied. When a research topic and method are in accord with one's intrinsic interests there is a personal investment in the ideas to be investigated. I see this principle of congruence as being essential to a sense of personal integrity.

She goes on to say that it is important to select a research approach that 'reflect[s] a harmony of relationship between self and method' (Dudley 1992, p.329). To choose a methodology that a person is congruent with is the key to ensuring that integrity is central to the study. After reading further readings on phenomenology, I began to identify strongly with its core principles and I felt that I was comfortable with this worldview.

4. The credibility of phenomenology amongst peers in the field of education

There has been a strong move to an interpretive or qualitative approach in educational research since the 1960s (Burns 1994, p.2). Qualitative research has become legitimate and this is evident by the proliferation of journal articles, books and conferences which have focused on its mode of analysis in recent times (Popkewitz 1984, p.87). The movement to qualitative research has grown because of the limitations of, and discontent with, positivist or quantitative research, which has come to dominate education.

Phenomenology emerged in the early 1960s as a method for research in education (Vandenberg 1987, p.1) and received attention in educational administration circles in the late 1970s due to the Greenfield vs Griffiths debates that were held during this time (Gronn 1983). Many of the early educational writers (eg. Greene 1972; Vandenberg 1971) whose work was informed by phenomenology wrote at a theoretical level and investigated educational phenomena philosophically. Greenfield's (1975) philosophical writing in the area of educational administration is a prime example here.

Recent times have also seen the emergence of a body of literature which has highlighted the *application* of phenomenology to educational research (see Barritt *et al.* 1985; Stone 1979; Verrier 1992; Sanders 1981; McDuffie 1988), although there is still a paucity of this type of research (McDuffie 1988). Van Manen (1990) argues, however, that there has been a resurgence of the phenomenological tradition in the human sciences.

In reviewing qualitative research in Australia over the last decade, Bartlett (1994, p.222) concluded that there has been a growing number of researchers who are doing qualitative research. Within qualitative research he included areas such as participatory action research, critical education science, case study method, policy analysis and feminist research (Bartlett 1994, pp.207-208). Of these, he pointed out that qualitative educational sociology, which has drawn upon critical theoretical methods, has been very influential. Here he is referring to the significant development of feminist research which has drawn upon post-modernist and uralist insights (p.219).

His view of qualitative research is that it must be seen to operate within a broader political, economic and social context. He goes as far as advocating that qualitative research should reconsider the use of statistics if such a move is to impact upon educational improvement (p.211).

That Bartlett does not mention phenomenological research is not surprising, given the limited amount of research that has been conducted in this area in education compared with more popular types of qualitative research. His philosophical position about the purpose of research is evident in his statement that research must be conducted for educational improvement and must consider the wider political, economic, and social agendas.

To evaluate a phenomenological study against criteria he sets for qualitative research is inappropriate because the purpose is fundamentally different. The objective of phenomenology is to understand human experience better and the objective of phenomenology will be met when the reader has gained a greater insight into the way the subject sees things (Barritt *et al.* 1985, p.32). While there might be an advantage in using a multi-disciplinary approach to research problems, i.e combining quantitative with qualitative data, it is my belief that taking a purely qualitative stance brings with it consistency and integrity.

In research, there will always be competing research traditions and competing assumptions about the purposes of research. With this thought in mind, it is likely that there will be resistance to phenomenology in educational research and other discipline areas because of its ontological and epistemological assumptions.

My doctoral study

The final part of this paper will outline the conceptualisation of my doctoral thesis, which is utilising phenomenology as its theoretical framework and its methodology. The concern is with principals' experience of professional development for themselves and for teachers in their schools. It is argued that there is a need to understand what professional development means for principals outside the confines of theoretical constructs, or overarching world views of these phenomena. While current educational policies and the research literature continue to endeavour to define professional development in a number of different ways reflecting particular purposes and in some cases different agendas, one of the assumptions of this study is that

> ..all meanings which are assigned to any education policy, practice, or program are relative to the values of the person who is intending meaning. (Mitchell 1990, p.161)

This study differs from most studies which have been conducted in the area of the principal's role in the professional development of teachers as it will provide a wealth of subjective evidence, which is often disregarded by other methods particularly used in the area of educational administration. To date, educational administration continues to be dominated by a technology of control which is inherent in a scientific view of management (Bates 1988). A phenomenological study thus offers an innovative and interesting way to study the life-worlds of the key players involved. Two to three semi-structured interviews (approximately 45 minutes each) will be conducted with ten principals of primary schools in order to investigate their experience of professional development and their experience of their response to teachers' professional development.

Conclusion

To arrive at my present understanding of phenomenology did not occur overnight. It was a long, yet interesting, journey where I experienced feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity and, at times, despair. My initial feelings of 'guilt' for turning away from a research tradition I had admired and read about over a number of years, have long since dissipated. My commitment to phenomenology is strong and I am convinced I have chosen wisely in the context of this study.

I decided that to 'understand' and to come to know the experience of a group of principals was the ultimate aim of this study. For this reason, I believe I have chosen the most effective methodology possible. I have not resolved all of the dilemmas. There is no doubt that I will face a new set of them as I embark on the data analysis phase.

In conclusion, I do believe that phenomenology has great potential in educational research and the main reason is that it puts at the centre of investigation the experience and knowledge of the key players concerned. It respects personal meanings and experiences from the life-worlds of those who are involved. The *verstehen* tradition will always be central in education and educational research.

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Chapter 11

Representation and interpretation in phenomenological research

Peter Willis

Introduction

This paper explores an approach to phenomenological research applied to the adult education practice which I pursued over more than two decades and centred on a series of significant episodes of different kinds of adult education practice and which I am currently drawing together into a thesis on adult education practice.

The format of the study is a retrospective exhibition constructed of dramatised re-visiting of these episodes, seeking to create a vivid presentation of the lived experience of adult education practice in those times and places. Such dramatic representations are set up in order to facilitate a parallel, more direct intuiting of the phenomenon of adult education practice, as if the observing mind, sensitised and brought to a focused attention by the dramatic presentations of these significant events in adult education practice, can discard these, as so many facilitative scaffolds, to contemplate, dwell upon and hold the lived experience itself.

In this project, the readers, imagined as visitors to the exhibition, are invited to tread the same track as the phenomenologist curator. They are presented with a narrative of the quest for understanding as a kind of participable autobiography. The writer, like the ancient mariner, engages the readers and acquaints them with his quest and the steps he has taken to come to grips with the phenomenon. He invites the readers to become aware of the social and personal context of each episode of his adult education practice and then to address a story of a significant event from each of the episodes. He then provides poetised revisitings of these experiences which are more poetic reflections than they are finished poems.

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The writer then returns from being stage constructor, storyteller and poet troubadour, to a 'seeking curator' of his own exhibition in search of meanings and significance. Here he attempts to draw out, distil, elements of the phenomenon visible in the presented episode. These will be later juxtaposed with other elements in subsequent sets of the exhibition to form a phenomenological collage at the conclusion of the exhibition.

The following is in three parts. The first explores the methodological foundations of the approaches of this research project. The second is one of the dramatised 'sets' in the 'exhibition', built around a significant event in an episode of my adult education practice. The third section provides commentary from the 'seeking curator' who explores the phenomenological themes in the event. There is an unusual addition specific to the commentary on this set when the phenomenological portrayal is linked to brief accounts of alternative analytical approaches which I had made in earlier writings. These are added as a contribution to the quest for a comprehensive understanding of the meanings of adult education practice and to highlight the distinctive contribution of the different approaches.

Part one: Foundations

Phenomenology

Phenomenology rose out of a reaction to positivism through which the discourses of the physical sciences were applied to all forms of human enquiry. Philosophers like Husserl (1964) wanted to create a counter move attending to the part humans play in the actual construction of the world as it is experienced. There is a tension between objectifying views that posit that the world, as we know it, exists 'out there' independently of human consciousness and opposed mentalist views that think the world is purely a construction of the mind.

Husserl's view was that all human thinking was, in fact, linked to something - that, when one thought, one always had something as an end point to the act of thinking. 'Thinking' is always 'thinking something'. This basic premise called 'intentionality' meant that, in fact, the very act of thinking is an act that affirms the union that exists between the thinking subject and the object of thinking. There is, in this view of human knowing, a permanent assumption that since we are permanently in the life world, we have always somehow a sense of being engaged in the world. In the act of knowing in which language is used (and it is suggested there are certain kinds of knowings which do not use language), there is a presumption, firstly, that the thing known has some objective existence and that, at the same time, in the act of naming it has been subjected to a hermeneutic through which it is named. In other words the act of naming stands between the knower and the 'things themselves'. It is never possible to use the kind of thinking and knowing which is linked to language to get behind language to a direct intuiting of the world outside the mind.

There are always some kind of conceptual assumptions built into the process of naming things perceived.

Following Merleau Ponty (1962), while agreeing that it is impossible to, in fact, reach a perfectly unmediated intuition of the world, the phenomenologist still attempts to bracket out received interpretations of an experience and to allow 'the things themselves' which are already there in the acts of consciousness, to present themselves afresh. Crotty (1996, p.38) speaks of the active role of consciousness:

> ... the mind reaches out to the object and into the object and draws it into itself, at once shaping the object and being shaped by it.

Allowing that consciousness has necessarily an active role in every act of knowing, it is useful to make a second distinction between active/reductive and intuitive/receptive forms of thinking. Thinking, the act of engaging in thought, does not always carry an active connotation in its use although, of course, in many cases it is imagined as a strongly active, almost transitive, process. One thinks when one 'puts one's mind to something', when one 'gets a grip on' an idea; when one analyses, categorises, generalises, discriminates between things, or groups things. The mind when engaged in these pro-active pursuits, can be imagined as a kind of sheepdog grouping ideas, separating, challenging, etc., etc.

There are, however, other times when the mind is 'struck by', 'seized by'; influenced by, impressed by, appalled by, something known. At these times, the mind seems more like a receptor receiving ideas and images and feeling and being moved my them.

Thus, the more one reflects upon one's thinking, the more one is confronted with a pro-active and a contemplative modality. The pro-active way is imagined as a series of processes variously interpreted, in which a thinker moves from taking in and naming experiences in some fashion, to ordering them and locating them into the more generalised categories of one's language and ways of seeing the world. The intuitive/contemplative way refers to more receptive and aesthetic forms of thinking and focusing attention. The thinking human positions him or herself *vis à vis* an object with a receptive stance and holds back discriminatory analytic thinking in favour of a more contemplative process. In this form of thinking the object of thought is less robustly dealt with. The mind does not seize upon the object to analyse and subdue it but attempts to behold it, to allow its reality, its beauty and its texture to become more and more present. Even here consciousness is still active, but the act of thinking is different: it is an activity of reception which holds the thinking mind back from closure and returns again and again to behold the object, allowing words and images to emerge from the contemplative engagement.

While stressing this intuitive, receptive mode of knowing, it is important not to overemphasise the receptive nature of this kind of direct knowing. The human knower does not open the shutters of the mind and an image of some object or experience does not physically imprint itself on the psyche. All kinds of knowing requires work by the knower. Ihde, in his interpretation of Merleau Ponty's work, refers to

> ... a world which is always pregnant with significance, but whose meaning must be re-won through an interrogation of its presence (1973, p.67)

The naming process takes place, as it were, with the lived experience in its texture and grubbiness and reality held before the mind. Frederick Franck in his book, *The Zen of Seeing*, (1973) encourages his students at one point to attempt to draw the object of their choice without looking away from it, letting the sketching hand with the pencil take care of itself. There is some similarity here with the phenomenological project as one seeks to know and to 'image' the known by holding it within one's gaze without in the first instance seeking to understand it or compare it with other things.

The representation of the intuited reality may be more by holistic approximations which over time are refined and more refined. These seem to be more readily carried in meditative aesthetic genres of writing, such as philosophical reflection, anecdotes and poetry. George Willis (1991, p173), refers to phenomenology as

> ... that form of interpretative enquiry which focuses on human perceptions, particularly on the aesthetic qualities of human experience. As such it is that form of interpretative enquiry that comes closest to artistic inquiry, and it can be represented metaphorically as a visual process.

In a recent publication, van Manen (1995, p.52) outlined his phenomenological agenda in a way which has considerable resonances with the project being pursued here:

> Since my interest is in the experiential aspects of pedagogic actions and interactions I will need to mobilise a kind of discourse, I believe, that tries to avoid theoretical abstraction and that tries to show narratively (or phenomenologically) the nature of pedagogical ... experience.

The construction of such a discourse applied to adult education, is the goal here. The texts for this project need to avoid the pitfalls of scientism or objectivism (by creating a text in the style of a scientific report), on the one hand, and narcissism (by creating a self-preoccupied and self-referencing text), on the other. It needs to tread a fine line which somehow brings together the objective and subjective dimensions of the lived experience.

Objectivity and subjectivity

The phenomenological project seeks what can be called objectivising subjectivity as apart from subjectivising subjectivity. Focusing on the thing being experienced but still as experienced **by me**. Human language carries this distinction easily when a person is asked what something was like (for example, a childhood visit to the dentist). The person might say: It was terrifying. I felt as if my heart would break, my palms were sweating, and I wondered of I would ever get out of it. The listener might interrupt saying, I can understand what **you** felt like, but can you tell me what **it** was like. The speaker might then talk about the shiny instruments, the white coat, the strange smells and sounds; the cold or the heat, the contoured chair, being recumbent, the pink hands of the surgeon and the grinding noise of the drill.

The phenomenological project seems to need both dimensions of the account. There is a sense that the objectivities that are highlighted in an experience are those which generated a strong subjective response. In a way, elements of an experience that do not impact upon the awareness of the person narrating it may not, in fact, be part of the phenomenon. The definition of a phenomenon, 'what manifests itself in experience'. suggests this, although in the process of reflection a person may become aware of many dimensions of an experience that were, in fact, manifested but somewhat not attuned to or at least not foregrounded in awareness.

This nature of the human mind to shift attention in an experience challenges the phenomenological researcher to contemplate, reflect upon a lived experience in many ways in order to generate a more comprehensive awareness of an experience while safeguarding its wholeness and freshness as a lived and immediate experience. It is this sense of shifting awareness and attention which has generated the method pursued in this project through which a phenomenon is revisited several times from slightly different vantage points.

These vantage points are foregrounded in four genres of representation combined in each set in the exhibition.

Four genres of representation

One of the challenges of this study has been to develop a textual genre for representing experiences which is appropriate to the phenomenological project. Elliot Eisner (1993, p.6) defines representation as

> ... the process of transforming the content of consciousness into a public form so they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others.

He then suggests that

> ... since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they make possible also differ. Different kinds of experiences lead to different meanings, which, in turn make different forms of understanding possible.

The four genres explored here are in response to the challenge for the researcher to find appropriate tools of representation to generate a knowing experience congruent with the attempt to highlight the 'livedness' of adult education practice before analysis or generalisation.

The four forms used here are called backgrounding, sketching, poetising and distilling.

Backgrounding provides a stage for the other forms. It provides an account of the physical and social contexts in which the different experiences of adult education practices were played out.

Sketching provides a narrative account, a story, of a critical incident which highlights adult education practice in that time and place as I experienced it.

Poetising seeks above all to depict the experience with vividness and immediacy, playing with words and rhythm, using phrases and images in a variety of ways to point up, reveal, the rich dimensions of the experienced world which are then presented to the reader. Not all such poetising, even if strikingly vivid, would necessarily be recognised simply as good poetry since poetry as a genre often includes interpretative leaps and other literary manifestations of deep analysis in which the phenomenon is re-presented as an interpreted reality rather than one simply portrayed.

Distilling comes back to the phenomenon seeking to highlight essential elements in the experience. It is the curator's summary to date of the themes presenting in the experience

The following provides an elaboration of these four 'enabling genres'.

Backgrounding

This textual genre provides an account of the circumstances, the dramatic stage on which the event generating the particular experience occurred. Its task is to set the scene, to locate the event within the social context of the adult educator's experience: Backgrounding attempts to provide a detailed account of the context and circumstances of the teaching/learning episodes to be contemplated in the project of intuiting what adult education practice is like as a lived experience. Michael Crotty (1996, p71) mentions the embedded nature of human meaning, that 'meaning is created historically'. He writes

> So, when we lay aside our everyday understanding and address the phenomenon that comes into view for us, we do not discover some pure form of meaning. We create, as always, historical forms of meaning. Yet they may well be new meanings. If not, they will at least be renewed meanings.

In Crotty's text, the phenomenological researcher, laying aside everyday understandings, attempts to contemplate the phenomenon, which is in some way present either in direct experience or in living memory.

In the project under consideration, several of the episodes in which the phenomenon of adult education practice was experienced, are considerably removed in time and place, yet sufficiently vivid in memory to be recalled and particularly through anecdotes of significant experiences of practice. When such anecdotes are located in a text for readers, their context requires textual elaboration in order for the point of the story to be understood. Anecdotes which are examined in detail in the next section rely on their ability to convey an experience through situated, particular and intense events. Van Manen (1990, p.117) gives an example of Alexander the Great meeting Diogenes the philosopher on a sunny day and asking him what he (Alexander) could do for him. Diogenes is said to have remarked, 'Stand out of my light'!

The impact of this anecdote requires contextual knowledge. It is presumed most readers of van Manen's sophisticated text would have some knowledge of ancient Greek history: who Alexander the Great was and why he was to be feared and the privileged place of philosophers in ancient Greece. Were these not known, the impact of the anecdote would be vastly reduced.

The backgrounding text thus has an ancillary function to locate and frame the sketching anecdote and, to a lesser extent, the poetising text. Its task is to contribute to the significance and meaning of the anecdote rather than to any causalities which could be linked to analytical discourses, which are not the aim of the anecdote and poetising texts.

The backgrounding text is constructed around five headings:

- the educator's culture and concerns
- the learners' culture and concerns
- the sponsor of the Adult Education Program
- the learning facilitative processes in their location, and
- any significant issues exerting an influence on the teaching/learning exchange.

Sketching: Phenomenological narrative

Within the project being pursued here, anecdotes provide a rich resource through which lived experience may be glimpsed and from which a phenomenological text may be constructed. Narrative has become of great interest in qualitative research because of its power to convey meaning at the same time as it describes events. The capacity to add meaning to information serves the agenda of researchers seeking to make a place for the constructivist nature of human communication, particularly when concerned with things and events as experienced and, according to Sandelowski (1991, p.162), not just observed.

Narratives are understood as stories that include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events - to render or to signify the experience of persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner.

This useful functional definition provides an overarching notion of the narrative form of which phenomenological anecdote, a version of which is called here 'sketching,' is one kind.

Apart from what stories and anecdotes do, there is also the question of how they come to be. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.415) have a more direct portrait:

> Story is therefore neither raw sensation nor cultural form; it is both and neither. In effect, stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history.

And, of course, narratives involve the tellers of stories in the first place and implicitly the listeners.

People live stories and, in the telling of them, reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones

Narrative forms are generally linked more directly to autobiography and biography than to the phenomenological project of portraying a particular experience. Nevertheless, narrative theory can illuminate anecdote. The general rules of narrative genre (cf Denzin 1989; Clandinin and Connelly 1994, p.416) will be presumed to apply in some ways to the phenomenological anecdote genre with its direct aim of providing some form of narrative representation of specific lived experiences.

Thus, to use the story genre in the sketching texts is to be constrained and energised by its 'rules'. According to Scholes (1982, p.59), a story needs a situation involving a predicament which needs solution, a central character engaged in the situation, and a plot leading to some resolution.

Carter (1993:p6) points to the significance of the teller of the story. She points out that

> ... in constructing stories, regardless of how convoluted and obscure they may be in particular instances, authors attempt to convey their intentions by selecting incidents and details, arranging time and sequence, and employing a variety of codes and conventions that exist in a culture.

Carter also quotes Iser (1976) and Culler (1975) in pointing out the reader's active engagement in constructing meaning from the story which reminds the 'writer of texts' that there will be no 'read meaning' unless the reader can somehow pick up or mirror the writer's stance and mood and that the writer has to consider the reader and the task of 'being heard'.

The sketching genre is chosen for this task to reach out and engage, seduce, the reader. It is able to carry dramatic quality. The memory of the significant event is converted to a re-collected text which is constructed as a story with its situation, actors and plot in such a way that it engages the audience, who in their turn and in their own way are 'taken in' to the experience.

The dramatic quality of the sketch is significant here. The backgrounding genre provides a stage setting which locates the event and frames it to foreground the experience. The sketch - a story on its own or interwoven with a second interpreting, poetising voice - becomes the play on the stage portraying the experience.

Sketching bears some relationship to the notion of the phenomenological anecdote and to autobiography.

Phenomenological anecdote

Sketching differs somewhat from the phenomenological anecdote described by Van Manen. Apart from the characteristics implied in the general narrative genre, the question returns to specific phenomenological related anecdotes. The main recent text exploring this in detail is that of van Manen (1990, p.115ff). Whereas many of the tools for narrative enquiry predispose towards analysis and categorisation, van Manen's are aimed at predisposing towards phenomenological lived experience portrayal. Drawing on Rosen's work on the importance of story, van Manen (p.121) has developed an extensive treatment of the genre of anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research.

He notes that phenomenological narrative has the power:

- to compel (a story recruits our willing attention)
- to lead us to reflect (a story tends to invite us to a reflective re-search for significance)
- to involve us personally (one tends to search actively for the story teller's meaning via one's own)
- to transform (we may be touched, shaken, moved by the story; it teaches us)

- to measure one's interpretative sense (one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretative sense)

A significant feature of anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research is that its task is to describe universal features of a phenomenon as experienced in real life situations rather than focusing on the actual literal sequence of events. The historical link between story narrative and the specific historical events which the narrative genre generates for the sake of the meaning of the experience may be somewhat stretched in various ways to pursue adequately its task of portrayal while keeping the story's essential structure .

Sandelowski's paraphrase of Edward Bruner's (1984) distinction between three forms of writing about events clarifies the differences between:

> ...a life as lived (what actually happened); a life as experienced (the images, feelings, desires thoughts and meanings known to the person whose life it is), and a life as told (a narrative). (p.163)

Following Sandelowski, it is clear that narratives can refer to a considerable range of lives from life as lived (in a bald narrative of events) to various accounts of life *as experienced*. Such narratives may attend to the subjective feelings and reactions to an event or they may focus more on the nature of the experience as lived with a stronger emphasis on the experience itself than on the subjective states of the experiencer. It is this second agenda which fits the phenomenological project. Thus, anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research has to focus on the structure of the experience itself rather than on the person having the experience.

Anecdote has also been linked to some forms of poetising (van Manen 1987) because what is being proposed is a form of poetic distillation applied to a story so that it carries truths about the structures of a lived experience without being restricted to its precise historical details. It is also somewhat similar to illustrative tales told in sermons where a story, linked to historical events in its genesis, is honed and refined over time so that it carries its message clearly, even though in the process its links to some real event in history are blurred. But sketching cannot be thought of as a purely teaching parable since the historical thread is needed to maintain a real link in lived or perhaps better 'possibly lived' experience rather than purely in didactic imagination.

Thus, sketching, the narrative form pursued here, represents a form of narrative which in one way is similar to phenomenological anecdote as described by van Manen, since it has the character of a story which vividly brings out the structure of the lived experience. On the other hand, it has a much more dramatic and historical character. It wants to maintain more detailed physical links with actual events, particularly as the story follows the backgrounding process through which it is located in place and time. Of course, in this case, sketching is also autobiographical and this raises another set of considerations.

Autobiography

Autobiography is useful in the quest for direct accounts of lived experience but has the constraints and benefits of its own genre. Autobiography has three dimensions of interest here. One is that it is personal story telling. The second is that it is the ordering of past experiences, a re-collection according to a particular ordering of the theme or themes. The final characteristic is that it is a form of performance aimed at an audience (Willis 1994, p85).

The third characteristic is shared with the whole text-building enterprise of this paper. The first sits well with the anecdotal genre with a major proviso. Autobiographical stories foreground the author. Sketching focuses on adult educational practice pursued by the author. The phenomenon is the centre of attention rather than the author. This considerable difference is highlighted in the kind of recollection aimed at here.

The re-collection agenda needs to be modified in the light of the overarching project. This is not the place for autobiographical defences and arguments against the author's critics. In this context, the re-collection, the ordering of events within the autobiographical genre, is the ordering of reflective contemplation focused on portraying lived experience rather than justifying one's part in its past and present.

Using the metaphor of a one act play, if backgrounding constructs the set for the play, sketching becomes the dramatic action in the play. The third genre, the poetising voice, is a soliloquy, an intensified portrayal of the experience, a meditative revisiting of the experience alongside or after the action. The distilling genre is the curator's voice, standing to the side of each set to provide an interpretative gloss for the audience and call back to the original question: Just what is adult education practice like? How does the experience of adult education practice present itself to us in this instance of practice?

Van Manen's comment (1990, p.119) that anecdote (understood in his sense) is rather like 'a poetic narrative which describes a universal truth' provides a perfect transition to the third genre: the poetised text, which moves midway between phenomenological anecdote as espoused by van Manen and poetry.

Poetising

The poetising text sets out to use much of the freedom and distillation of the poetic genre while focusing on the lived experience made present in memory and portrayed in some historicity in the backgrounding and sketching genres.

The poetising phenomenological text is a kind of poetry, but much poetry is not a poetising phenomenological text. Poetry gives the poet room to explore, theorise, narrative, imagine, hypothesise, condemn, dream, conjecture, etc. A phenomenological poetising text attempts to give a direct account of how the phenomenon manifests itself without continuing, as a poet might, to explore all kinds of significances which the poet might perceive in comparisons, reductions, analyses, critique, etc.

The poetising text, however, does lay down to be a kind of open explicit poem using poetic forms available to the genre.

The poetic genre takes reader and poet into a depth of insight and representation. Poetry is able to illuminate and crystallise experience. As van Doren (1967, p.xii) said, paraphrasing and then quoting the poet Thomas Merton:

> Poetry at its best is contemplation of things and of what they signify, not what they can be made to signify, but what they actually do signify, even when nobody knows it ...'Their meaning is not something we impose upon them, but a mystery which we can discover in them, if we have the eyes to look with.'

Hogins (1974, p.5) puts it succinctly that 'if we learn to read a poem well, like the poet, we learn to see things in a fresh way'.

In poetry the emphasis is less on action and plot and more on the sensations, images and thoughts that accompany an experience. Hogins again:

> When you feel a poem is 'right,' it is not because you have been swayed by the poet's logic or the evidence marshalled to support his opinion. Rather you have been able to identify with him [sic] and find a common area between his view of experience and your own.

The simplicity and directness and 'here-and-nowness' of the poetic genre, its concern with the 'whatness' of things (Nelson 1996), are summarised in Dinah Livingstone's paraphrasing of Ernesto Cardinale's guidelines for writing poems:

> ... the guidelines caution against thumping rhymes and metres; they recommend the use of particular rather than general terms: 'iguana' rather than just 'animal', 'flame tree' rather than just 'tree'. Poetry has an added appeal if it includes proper names of people, rivers towns etc. Rather than being based on ideas poetry should be based on things which reach us through the senses. We should write as we speak with the natural plainness of the spoken language, not the written language. Avoid cliches or hackneyed expressions. Try to condense the language as much as possible; all words that are not absolutely necessary should be left out (1993, p.117)

This represents in many ways the rules which have governed the poetising text attempted throughout this project . The aim is to invoke an immediacy and vividness in the represented experience for the reader.

Distillation

The distillation text is a revisiting of the phenomenon of adult education practice, an attempt to elaborate the meanings of the lived experience as illumined in and through the catalytic texts, to portray my reflective grasp of the phenomenological structure of these adult education experiences.

There are two processes here. The first is a reflective summary in which I provide a condensed review of the experience as lived by me, which has been dramatised and elaborated in the backgrounding, sketching and poetising texts. The second is an attempt to identify emerging themes which seem to be a central part of the experience.

In demonstrating his approach to phenomenological writing, van Manen gives an example taken from his research into children's experience of being left by their parents in the care of others (1990, p.86ff). In his research, he collected anecdotes from various people concerning their childhood experience of this phenomenon. He explores these experiences initially under the heading 'situations'. He then begins the laborious task of what he calls 'seeking meaning', in which he builds a thematic account of the structure of this childhood experience.

In the text being constructed here, 'distilling' represents what 'seeking meaning' does in van Manen's text. As he writes:(p.86)

> We try to unearth something 'telling', something 'meaningful', something thematic in the various experiential accounts - we work at mining meaning from them.

Whereas in the account of van Manen's research there is provision for a summary of the experiences of a range of contributors, in this project there is provision, under the heading 'reflective summary', for a kind of distilled review of the experience brought to life catalytically through the influence of the backgrounding, sketching and poetising processes. Leaving these enabling processes to one side, even bracketing these, the experience is once more revisited, attended to directly, seen how it presents itself to the researcher.

Following this reflective summary is the part entitled 'emerging themes' in which attempts are made to uncover emerging narrative or phenomenological themes relating to the particular experience of adult education practice being explored in the particular set. In the larger text being built, these will be constructed in a cumulative, circular sequence: the experiences framed and dramatised in each set will be juxtaposed and elaborated as they are viewed in different sets.

These brief explorations complete this section. They lead to the second section of this paper which presents one of the sets from the larger 'exhibition' which relates to the experience of adult education practice with Aboriginal people in North West Australia, one of the episodes of adult education practice being explored. This second section is in two parts. The first part, backgrounding, provides the setting and introduces the players in the story. The second is a poetised narrative in two voices in which the story of the episode is told, integrated with a parallel reflective soliloquy.

Part two: Adult education with the Mirima Council

Backgrounding

The Mirima council project was a community development project which I established with the Miriwung people at Kununurra, North West Australia, in the early 1970s. It centred on the establishment, resourcing and eventual collapse of a market garden project and the successful appropriation of its vehicles for ceremonial and social activities.

The educational project I pursued with the people was linked to setting up and running two community projects. The first was a representative community council; the second a market garden controlled by this community council. These projects involved related educational processes relating to the range of procedures involved in these two projects.

The adult educator: Ideals and culture

I was engaged as a Roman Catholic priest for most of the 1970s in an Aboriginal community development program in the Eastern Kimberley region of North West Australia. I established the program as an extension of my pastoral ministry to the Miriwung people, most of whom were affiliated with the Catholic Church. It was an intervention which I initiated with them when they moved from affluent quasi-servitude on cattle stations in the Eastern Kimberley region, where I had first met them, to settle on the fringes of Kununurra in relatively autonomous poverty and social disintegration.

I had two reasons for wanting to help them set up decision-making structures and economic enterprises. The first was that I thought that by such action they would become organised and therefore able to manage the many transitions which were occurring in their lives. The second was that I had been informed by the Federal Government that, if any Aboriginal group formed itself into an incorporated association and proposed to engage in positive economic and social programs, they would qualify for considerable Government resources, which this impoverished community was in dire need of.

I had recently been ordained and had no experience or training for this kind of work. I was however a member of the recently formed East Kimberley Health Organisation, which proposed ideas of community development to which I was attracted.

The method I used to pursue the ideas of community development, however, I had learnt from the time I spent at Catholic missions in the region.

The learners: Aboriginal settlers at the Kununurra Aboriginal reserve

In the late 1960s and early 1970s many Aboriginal people living on Kimberley and Northern Territory cattle stations left, or were dismissed from, cattle work under the influence of the pressure of cash wages, falling cattle prices and the use of helicopters to muster cattle. They left or were driven away from their homes on these stations to live in reservations and fringe camps around townships in the Kimberleys and Northern Territory.

Around Kununurra, the Aboriginal people who came in from the stations in the region were mainly Miriwung speaking from the East Kimberleys who had strong links with their traditional culture and spoke 'cattle station English' as their third or fourth language.

I had met most of these people in the course of my pastoral duties as the local parish priest when I visited the isolated cattle stations which had been their homes.

The Miriwung considered themselves 'the Catholic mob' and so, when I visited the Aboriginal Reserve which I did almost daily, it was easy to convene meetings. It is significant that I was closely linked with them. Two Aboriginal members of the Reserve community at Kununurra mention this in their recorded recollections (Shaw 1981, p.83).

When I became involved in community development, I changed the emphasis of my ministry from directly religious matters to a social development agenda: group decision making, addressing social problems, and working out ways to find employment.

The sponsor

There was no official sponsor for this project. It was initiated by me as an extension of my pastoral ministry but it had no specific sponsorship. Resources were provided by me from the parish: fuel for the Toyota, stationery, the odd phone call, or secondhand corrugated iron for the shade shelter.

The arena and the learning-related processes

The Mirima project took place at the Kununurra native reserve - a small settlement located on the edge of the town about a kilometre from the city centre. It had been originally built for Aboriginal pensioners but had become home to more than 100 people who had moved in from cattle stations in the region. The adult education processes pursued in this project were held at a shaded meeting place purpose-built by the group and myself with secondhand materials donated from the parish and erected in the middle of the oval communal space between the 12 pensioners huts.

The educational strategy I employed can be called 'push-start action-based teaching'. It traces its roots to a once often-used 'top down' missionary approach to indigenous people. The missionaries establish an enterprise for and within a target population involving them as much as possible as apprentices and co-workers in the project. The enterprise once established is then supposed to be handed over gradually to the target people while the initial support is gradually withdrawn.

I mentioned to the people that the local medical officers had said that the children should eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and that a local horticultural adviser employed by the local agricultural research station had said that it was possible to set up a large garden on land next to the reserve, which could be irrigated from the irrigation channel nearby. (Kununurra was the site of the Ord River Irrigation Project.) I was able to point out that a project like this would very likely attract funds from the Government. There was a lot of interest in the project from the participants and they voted to support further negotiations which I proposed to set up between the Government and the people. I suggested that the people on the reserve form a representative council. I pointed out that they would have more control over their lives and the Federal Government would reward their *independent Aboriginal action* by underwriting their enterprises.

I had already seen mission projects in other places which were set up following the 'push-start action-based teaching' method mentioned above. I attempted to use a modified version of the same strategy by persuading the Miriwung to allow me to form them into a representative council which would run the proposed market garden and which they would initially run with my assistance and eventually take over as their own. I pointed out that the Government would underwrite this project and provide money and resources for it, including a large truck for all the activities of the project.

The Mirima council eventually became an incorporated association. It attracted a sizeable grant for the project, including a large truck. I remember the arrival of the truck caused what I thought was an extraordinary amount of jubilation for what I thought was a work resource to cart fence posts, tools, fertiliser, etc. The Mirima garden was cultivated and fenced as long as the project money for wages continued. The vegetables grew, were photographed, flourished - and died in the rows. They were never harvested or marketed. The truck became particularly useful for moving large groups to ceremonial meetings in remote places in the Kimberleys and western Northern Territory (Willis 1995).

Issues

One of the major issues in this project was the preoccupations of the Aboriginal people, many of whom were recently unemployed and recently removed from their homes on cattle stations. There was widespread unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse and domestic violence. For many of the people, living on the reserve at Kununurra was to be living in an out-of-control way with no whitefellow boss exercising authority, in close proximity to people of different language groups and different family affiliations who were relative strangers.

One of the major issues relating to the educational engagement in this project was the difficulty of understanding proposed ideas, partly because of lack of common language but partly because what was proposed had never been seen.

Another issue was the habitual modes of opportunistic and ambiguous communication and decision making used between the educator and the people, both of which were pursued with huge amounts of ambiguity and lack of accurate knowledge about the real nature of proposed innovations.

The backgrounding text is be followed by the sketch which contains a poetised reflection interwoven with the narrative.

Sketching: Gone away

One more ride down the side road to the Aboriginal reserve;
park the Toyota near the shade tree, blow the horn -
'Time for meeting!' shout, grab the briefcase and the
papers, settle back against the tree. Weary. Weary.
Roll a smoke, brush the ground dust from sweaty hands,
sweat marks on brown cotton pants.

And wait, wait, puff the cigarette, wait,
shift, stand up, move, wait ... Now at last Bronson
the old Miriwung bossman ex stockman
walking to the meeting place, courteous, tall,
massive; Manfred, his mate, won't be
far behind and others trickling up
greet, cough, spit to the side,
roll smokes, sit around. Eh! ngabang.[1]

These are the elders. Miriwung men I baptised last year.
They are dignified, good humoured; enduring hardship
without self pity. I admire them, enjoy their company. I won't
mind if some slippage between what is agreed and
what is done and who knows what will happen around
the garden project I am promoting. On the missions
gardens were never a great success.

What about Morris? I can see him sitting outside his hut.
He's another leader, more for younger people; He knows
English better than those other station people. He can
read a bit, even write, from his time in the Darwin
leprosarium helping the doctors. He's not as close to me

as the other easy station blokes. I can't work him out. Oh good,
he's walking across; took his time; he's wearing sunglasses
like that bloke from Darwin; good, he's got the briefcase
I gave him for his copy of papers we need at the meeting.
Why's he taking so long? Is the project's demands
feeding his reluctance or is he just making me wait?
He knows some of my games - but surely he must know
we both stand to gain. All he has to do is follow the script
I built up with the mob while he was watching, in all those
meetings, meetings, meetings.

Eh, you mob, this the different meeting.
This for project business, not church business.
I bin tell you at the Mass place. This not
church word; this not Catholic word,
this different; this project word. You mob
living long time away from station now,
away from country, on this reserve. You bin
tell me lotta times you lonely for country.
You got no killer[2] *for beef, no rice, no flour*

This reserve got nothin', no store, no cattle.
People starvin'. We bin talk lotta time - for
two way: work for get back country - this the
long time project and garden project we might
be gettum straight away. Gov'ment want to
help blackfeller set up rown[3] *projects; might be*
give you money for garden: fence, water pipe,
pump, truck, Toyota - make a big garden for
fruit and vegies, make your kids strong;
good argument for land might be;
What you mob reckon? Good idea or what?
You mob always say 'yoo'.[4] *You sure you mean that?*

This Gov'ment different now: they want talk
to blackfellers himself for projects, not
whitefeller friends. You mob gotta make a council
to talk for you; send a paper to Canberra
for that garden and truck. No use
whitefeller word, gotta be blackfeller himself.

What you reckon you mob? OK? OK?
What you reckon Bronson ?[mmmm Bloody hell,

is he agreeing or what?] *What you mob reckon?*
OK? OK? OK. Oh, OK then. You want to send that
word to Canberra? OK? OK? OK. I can write your word;
you gotta sign that paper.

What you reckon Morris, Mr. Chairman? We can
send that letter about the project about the garden?
Is that OK? You want me to write some notes for
that letter? OK? OK. Here's a draft letter. What you
think? Can you read the type words? OK? OK?
[This is driving me crazy].

Morris signs the letter with crabbed hands and fingers from leprosy. He looks at me and the group under the shed. 'Finish the meeting', he says, sun glasses, white shirt, shorts and socks - a Darwin city black, walking back in his tin shed away from leprosy, away from the benevolent surgeons he worked with. I bet they didn't speak this weird station English.

Bone-weary from keeping the dialogue going between me and the people. Trying to stop answering my own questions when I am with the people. Take the signed paper; post it to Canberra. Chuck in the lure and hope for a result when it wiggles on the Canberra desk.

Hey you mob,
[Toyota engine still running, slam the door.
News, news from Canberra: the bait has been taken,
the eagle has landed.]
'Gov'ment man got that letter; coming for meeting
and you mob gotta talk. I can sit with you but
I can't talk; this got to be your rown word.
When he coming from the airport for meeting, you
mob gotta talk. It's your project, OK? OK?

At the meeting place, introductions, fingers crossed
and waiting, waiting. The Canberra man, nervous of
the silence, talking, talking. People looking blank.
I itch to yell at them. *[Don't they realise all they*
have to do is nod and smile? He's doing all the talking ...
What's wrong with them? They drive me crazy]. A friend in
the Canberra office a few days later, copies and sends the
report for us. He gives guarded support for the project with

some fear that the people are being pushed by 'the priest' into a project they may not really want. Next meeting, I tell the people about the Canberra man's report.

That Canberra man, he reckons alright, but might be I pushen you mob too much. What you reckon? You mob agreein' for that garden project all the time isn't it? You always sayin' 'Yoo' when I say 'Warrang ngi'?[5] *Might be something though. You mob don't do much if I don't come for meeting. What that? You mob laughin' for that but I'm not head stockman. I'm not boss for project. That your business; I'm just helpin'; get you started. This gotta be your own project all the way. OK? OK? OK.*

Hey, you mob, we got order form for the garden project just come in this letter from the Gov'ment. They gonna give us water pump and that big truck, we bin ask for; and four wheel drive car for people. What you mob reckon? What kind truck you mob want? What kind four wheel drive car? Gotta put it on the order form. You want bull bar, OK? You want spotlights, cattle crate, long range tanks? Might as well: Toyota eight ton, what you reckon? And Toyota four wheel drive - is that the one? Gov'ment reckon OK. Comin' next week.

The huge red truck, delivered to the Toyota depot, is driven triumphantly by Jimmy, the only truck driver in the mob, to the centre of the reserve. Morris, the meeting chairman, drives the brand new Toyota four wheel drive ute. A huge crowd surround the vehicles, clapping and praising me and lining up for ride.

What you mob clappin' for me? This not my truck for you. This from Gov'ment, not me. I was helpin' you mob just helpin'; Gov'ment give you that truck, not me. That your truck for you mob. That belong to you fellers proper way, straight up. No one can take that away; that's your rown truck.

This is a time to strike - to focus on the project while there is the euphoria and optimism and while my credibility is high.

Now we got work; we got to keep the garden goin'; keep the water pump goin'. Easy with that truck:

Jimmy good truck driver for that. Easy get
fence posts, wire, cart sand and cement
for our garden shed, load fertiliser.
And easy pick up people for work in that
new four wheel drive. Morris got licence;
he can drive; he can take people for garden work.
You won't need rides from me.
Won't be long; we gonna have tomatoes,
watermelons, chillies for all the camps.
Good for kids. When we meeting for all this?
Must be next week. I gotta go to Broome,
be back next week ...

In Broome, I tell the other missionaries about the
success of the project, insisting on the people's owning
the project is a key to its being taken up so strongly.
I am anxious to get back.

Where all the people? I'm back for meeting.
Garden got no water, good chillies,
watermelons, everything growin' up,
dryin' out.

People gone for business,[6] ngabang.
Morris gone to country, got that four wheel drive;
big truck he gone too; big mob blackfellers
gone for business; people gone away, come back soon
after business; look around country.
Good truck that, lotta people, lotta swag,
water drum. No more taxi; no more lookin' for ride,
mob got proper truck, rown truck.

They gone, ngabang,
all that mob gone.

My own words about ownership beam back to me. Walking
back to my Toyota ute; start and drive up the side-road back
to my church house: soon the people will be gone
from church too, they can travel far away for business now;
my Aboriginal congregation will be dispersed: to ceremonies,
visits, pick up and drop off friends, relations in the big red
truck like a big ship, almost an ark, sailing unchallenged, protected;

from station to station, town to town, beholden to no one
moving around country.

The formalised solemnities of community development
with ngabang; ideas about regaining country and feeding
kids etc., costing nothing, safely acted out under the umbrella
of long standing ministry and friendship. And then this unexpected
panacea to the ills of lost country, lost relations, lost dreamings.
Surely never deliberately planned, like so many things in this
accepting way of being in the world, meanings and benefits
unravelled as situations change, opportunities perceived as
'once off' in the precarious post colonial world, suddenly to be
seized.

I laugh ruefully, like Zorba the Greek when his projects collapsed;
when bills could not be delivered,
when repossession notices were sent and no one
received them - gone away.

This teaching project (in the absence of
its jubilant beneficiaries), in retrospect, is much action learning
for me and them. At another level I am none the wiser although
I think I know why they clapped for me
when the truck arrived.

This poetised account completes the second section of this paper.

The third and final section of the paper introduces the curator who provides a brief reflective summary of the experience before speaking of the themes emerging from the contemplation of this experience. This is followed by two brief analytic interpretations of the same episode excerpted from other writings referring to this experience, which are included here to complement the phenomenological accounts.

The section ends with a note from the curator reflecting on the curating process itself, who reports an additional enrichment from the juxtaposed research approaches.

Distillations

Reflective summary

My sensitised mind brought back more than twenty years, lets go the backgrounding and sketching scaffolds and once more re-lives and is saturated in the experience of setting up the learning experiences in the Mirima council and market garden project. Transported to the Kununurra Aboriginal reserve, I am aware of the flat grey of the earth pounded by thousands of Aboriginal feet; children running, walking. I am aware of the red Kimberley landscape - the dusty trees, red stone ridges rising behind the Aboriginal reserve; the smoke from cooking fires from the Aboriginal families camped nearby. Under the meeting place corrugated iron roof we built in early days, I am aware of the makeshift table and the three chairs brought over for the meeting. I know that, if I sit and lean back into the chair's support, I will lose my poised stance and will have no place from which to maintain the intense engagement I need to keep the connecting link - eye contact, smile, tiny including signs to keep the mob together and on the track I am trying to take them. My belly aches with the tension.

I am aware that I need to come to a closure. I am aware that I need a decision to warrant my continuing to act on the people's behalf. My tension is not a tension of depression or stress from outside forces. It is the stress of holding the threads of engagement and plaiting additional threads to make a rope of commitment to the project which I cannot really explain until there is something concrete to see.

I am stressed in trying to communicate with my basic Aboriginal English. I look for more concrete words to run alongside words like council, decision making, community development, project and the like. I am working with a kind of guessed approximation. I can't ask these benevolent men to tell me in their own words what I have just said and they have just agreed to; to back-translate my language. I have tried it before with individual men and women and have found not much improvement in comprehension. So many of my words refer to things with no parallel in Aboriginal experience. I talk a long time to many of the people individually and I think we have a kind of understanding but I have never felt confident to ask one or other of them to give me an account of what has been said. I would like to, but in my exchanges with them English communication is so reduced and basic that I feel such a request would be an intrusion.

So I work with the quality of eye contact and laughter. I crack jokes looking for the laughter which I take to mean I have been understood and, in the moments of connected comprehension, I try to insert related ideas, suggestions.

But it is not only living with vague comprehension. I am also living with vague agreement to my proposals. I have been with them so long I have developed a sense of the quality of their agreement with my proposals. They seem to agree with many of my proposals as long as I carry out the agreed action with them. When there is an agreement for an action to be pursued in my absence, I know the execution will be contingent upon the absence of competing claims on their time by relatives or other welfare workers or, of course, other competing missionaries who may seek to pre-empt the people's plans.

I build my agreement in the early months and years of my time with the people. I am negotiating a learning agreement from them to take up an unfamiliar script which, up till now, has been similar to the implicit learning in my Christian ministry where there is little demand on them to do or demonstrate their learning independently.

But there are differences. For one thing, the potential rewards are significant and tangible; for another the people may be called upon, as they were when the Government man visited, to display some fruits of their learning.

In my Christian teaching with these people, I feel they may have another religiosity, a different way of being with God, which may well surpass the weak spirituality of Western Christianity. I can teach with a great deal of space for their own *geist* to fill the gaps. But here, in the teaching of social action, I feel the hard wind of challenge - to get through to the people and to generate a grounded assent evidenced in sustained action, at first with me and then autonomously.

My stress rests on the slippery nature of their understanding and compliance with the learning implications of the choices they have agreed to. I feel instinctively that it will be all right as long as I am with them and as long as my credibility with them is not challenged too radically.

The distilling moves from reflection to some of the narrative themes emerging.

Emerging themes

The experience of adult education practice is to be running a raft of material, physical processes which are supposed to generate a learning response without ever knowing what is happening, what people are thinking, feeling or planning, or at what level of engagement they are responding. The experience of adult education practice is to be always attuned to, worried about, the level of learning-related engagement.

Practising adult education is thus trying to get through to learning. Trying to call the people together, to negotiate a move from whatever motivated them to attend the meetings to engagement in the learning-related processes in such a way that they open the possibility of learning, of becoming different. Trying to minimise disruptions and distractions. Trying to get a learning stance to emerge from benevolent passive acquiescence. Trying to keep the people with me on the sequence of learning-related activities, to go beyond 'riding' on my initiative to autonomous choice for learning. Practising adult education is trying to keep a relationship going at several levels. Practising adult education is maintaining authority to endorse my claim to be followed, sight unseen, by the people along the processes of meetings and negotiations. My adult education credibility is grounded on my being able to deal with the Government. I have to keep ahead of other contenders seeking to erode my credibility. Practising adult education means being present to the people - attending meetings; exchanging ideas and information, facilitating participation in the learning generative processes, engagement in learning, seeking grounded choices for future change.

Practising adult education also meant accepting and validating the choices of people in the educational relationship to go a different way, to take up some and not other of the options, to renegotiate in their own way. Practising adult education meant being taken for a ride and realising the benefit in it for the learners, although not so much for the teacher.

Allied interpretations

The meanings emerging from the phenomenological account being worked towards in these pages complement meanings generated by more analytic approaches from social science, which have also been pursued at different times in the last couple of years. The question is to what extent such diverse approaches can serve to enrich each other and the reader. The following is a brief account of two interpretations where it is argued the research approaches actually enriched each other.

There are two basic interpretative texts which I developed at various times since the project in an attempt to make sense of what happened, to understand it and to learn from it. One concerns the adult education practice as a type of action-based teaching. The other looked at adult education practice in this setting as deeply shaped or even destroyed by the patterned ways Aborigines had developed to manage the encounters and agreements with their white mentors.

Action-based teaching and assumptions

As an enterprise to facilitate learning, the setting-up of the Mirima council and the Mirima garden are, as we have seen, a form of 'push-start action-based teaching', i.e. an activity was set in train under the initiative and direction of an outsider from which ongoing engagement and simultaneous learning was expected as the project was handed over to the recipients.

One of the challenging dimensions of experiential learning is that it can generate different outcomes from different participants. Educators usually attempt to prepare participants and debrief afterwards to elicit planned learning outcomes although, the further away the culture and background of the participants from those of the facilitator, the greater the likelihood that different outcomes will be experienced. This is particularly the case when there are a large number of assumptions which are presumed to be verified.

In the case under consideration, there were a considerable number of assumptions which were not verified. One is that the thing being done is *valued equally by initiator and follower* and that the follower will, in fact, want to give it the same priority when the initiator is not there.

The status of activities relating to the Mirima garden was thus affected by the *presence or absence of the initiator.*

If he was present, activities related to the garden also related to the political relationships between the initiator and the Aboriginal men. If he was absent, the ordinary routines of gardening tended to be left to women who had not been members of the executive committee which had made the decisions to establish it.

Patrons and Riders

In reflecting on the exchanges of that period, (Willis 1995), I coined the phrase 'patrons and riders' to represent the character of the relationship with myself as the would-be patron, inviting the Miriwung to participate in the action learning I had set up.

I offered this patronage and invited this participation through which Government benefits would come without being consciously aware that, within the discourse of the relationship between us, such an invitation would be linked to earlier invitations to religious activity and their acceptance of the invitation would be perceived as 'making me happy' and would therefore depend on my being there and would have little meaning if I was absent.

The Miriwung people, the 'riders' in the phrase, for their part while at least partially accepting my invitation, never totally accepted my patronage. They refused to become my grateful clients but, because they did not want to offend me, they went along with the activities I proposed. They, as it were, 'went for a ride' on the energy and direction of the project and got off when its course deviated from the path they wished to follow.

Although the specific project was effectively aborted as a development exercise, the Miriwung did, in fact, learn a great deal about how to manage living in Kununurra and dealing with whitefellows who were not their bosses - things they were interested in learning. The complexity of the action learning accompanying the garden project points to the costs and benefits of action learning when used as a way to facilitate change. Setting up the Mirima garden was a complicated but effective way of getting a truck, but not necessarily much good for the task of community development.

Conclusion

As far as I was concerned, the experience surrounding this project had a profound influence on my learning and later life choices. As a coloniser, a person placed over Aborigines whose authority came from non-Aboriginal sources, my role impeded much I wanted to do.

I did not really object too much to being taken for a ride since the truck was so evidently a most wonderful resource deemed otherwise unobtainable and used for so many significant activities hitherto postponed due to lack of transport. Nevertheless, I did not want to have my educational role subverted according to unspoken other agendas. I realised that I could not pursue my community education agendas from the stance I had. I needed to change the relations I had with the Aborigines and other whites to something more equal and elective.

On the other hand, even if a more equal relationship developed, there was still the question of developing ways to work with Aboriginal people's real needs and to support their moves to understand and engage meaningfully in their post-colonial world.

These last interpretations have, I think, considerable validity in offering explanations for why the adult education project went the way it did. The phenomenological exploration and its preparatory texts - the backgrounding and the poetic sketch - bring the reader much closer to the adult educator's lived experience and, in my view, add a more immediate kind of knowledge about adult education practice.

When texts from these different perspectives are brought together, a more textured account of a real historical educational engagement with its various significances can emerge. Adult education practitioners seeking insight into their practice will find an enriching complementarity in these juxtaposed texts and may feel inspired to pursue something similar in their own adult educational work. The phenomenological portrayal of lived experience can have a pedagogic contribution by generating resonances in its audience and by providing a catalyst for people to begin to look at their own lived experience.

Notes

1. *ngabang*: Miriwung word for father
2. *killer*: bullock killed for beef on cattle station
3. *rown*: Kununurra Aboriginal English for 'own'
4. *Yoo*: Miriwung word for 'yes'
5. *warrang ngi*: Miriwung phrase for 'Isn't that right?'
6. *business*: important Aboriginal ceremonies often taking several days, for which people may travel long distances

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Chapter 12

Capturing the experience of the clinical nurse specialist through phenomenology

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This paper was presented at the 'Method and Meaning in Human Sciences' Cross Disciplinary Conference, The University of Newcastle, June 25-28, 1996. The author would like to acknowledge the support of The Faculty of Nursing, The University of Sydney and The NSW Nurses' Registration Board in the undertaking of this work.

This paper describes a recently undertaken study that sought to understand and make visible what it means to be an experienced nurse at the bedside. Specifically, it investigates that category of nurse designated Clinical Nurse Specialist, an advanced practice nurse who has fulfilled certain criteria in order to be able to claim expertise in a given area, and receive such a title. Undertaking this study has culminated in the development of a phenomenological text, which is an attempt to make manifest what it is really like to be a CNS. This paper maps the route leading to the crafting of the phenomenological text and concludes with an excerpt from the final text offered as an example of phenomenological writing.

Like much research, this study was motivated by my own social and historical life circumstances (van Manen 1990, p.31), and situating my *self* in relation to it requires a return to the days when I was nursing at the bedside. As it happens, my social reality as an expert nurse is summed up rather well by the words of Mangan, who in 1989 wrote:

> The unique clinical knowledge of the experienced nurse remains obscure, non transferable and undervalued. Expert nurses are increasingly driven from the bedside by the frustrations and indignations that result from a lack of recognition.

This is a summation of the end result of certain historical, sociological and political dynamics that have helped fashion the discourses and practice of nursing over the years, but which are too complex and too numerous to discuss here. Except to say, that much of the work of the expert clinical nurse has neither been recognised nor valued because it is essentially *invisible*. Until fairly recently that is, because as mentioned, this study (and some before it), has sought to reveal the invisible nature of nurses' work, to try and give it substance, to make the intangible tangible. Even before the 'scourge' of economic rationalisation, nurses had become aware that when hospital invoices are presented to patients, nursing costs are often hidden as if nurses provided no identifiable services (Chinn and Jacobs 1987).

Because of the lack of recognition or valuing of the nurse's work, especially of those who had become experts at the bedside, nursing has historically shown a higher turnover than most professional groups (Breust 1989) and the career trajectory has almost always been into either education or administration, with many others leaving the field altogether. In my case I left bedside nursing for a career in nursing education. And yet, since the time of my leaving, there have been significant developments within the profession, not least of which has been the introduction of a clinical career framework specifically designed to halt the exodus of expert nurses from the clinical environs. One position that has evolved from the introduction of the clinical career ladder has been that of the CNS.

In NSW, a registered nurse is eligible to apply for the position of CNS once s/he has worked in a specialty area for at least three years following an initial post registration year or has worked in an area for at least 12 months and holds a post-graduate qualification in the specialty. It may be of interest to note here that the role in NSW is unique (because it actually does not resemble that of a CNS anywhere else). But, regardless of nomenclature, senior nurses everywhere can generally be equated by virtue of the expertise inherent in their roles.

Basically, the study was mounted as an 'expedition' to discover if the clinical reality for expert nurses had changed since my experience of it a decade ago. I proposed to return to the wards to gather lived experiences and was hoping that the CNSs would be encouraged to relive their experiences and to tell their stories so that I could re-tell them. I wanted to establish an accurate representation of the nature of their practice as they saw it, their everyday lived reality, so that it could be made visible and hence better understood. The phenomena of nursing have been, and are being explored quite extensively, yet to date no one has attempted to describe the lifeworld of the CNS in a 'realistic' manner in order to discover what the job *is* as presented to nursing through the experiencing of it by a CNS.

Phenomenology as the methodological key to immediate experience was chosen to underpin the research process. And yet, being aware that phenomenology as a philosophical movement has evolved in such a way as to produce several theoretical and methodological extensions, and of the variety of contemporary phenomenologies from which to choose, I believed it essential to explore the central tenets of the foundational writings of original thinkers in the field, not least of those being the divergent epistemological and ontological assumptions arising from Husserl and Heidegger. If I was to do phenomenology, the question became which variegation of phenomenology would best suit my original intent - to look, that is, at the reality of a group of CNSs and get to the 'essenceness' of their role as the phenomenon. The phenomenon being that of 'CNSing'- the phenomenon of the job. In order to generate meaning from the experience of CNSing, I eventually turned to van Manen.

Van Manen (1990) asserts, that, while the methodology of phenomenology offers an approach to research that aims at being 'pre-suppositionless', nevertheless it has a certain *methodos* - a way. In view of which he offers a set of guidelines and recommendations to enable a principled form of inquiry; that 'neither simply rejects or ignores tradition, nor slavishly follows or kneels in front of it' (van Manen 1990, p.30). This study was guided by van Manen's (1990) six related activities to the process of phenomenological reflection and analysis. These are listed as follows:

- turning to the phenomenon
- investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
- reflecting on essential themes
- describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
- maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and
- considering parts and whole (see van Manen 1990, pp.30-31)

Human science phenomenology asks what is this or that kind of experience like. 'It offers the possibility of plausible insights that bring us into more direct contact with the world' (van Manen 1990, p.9). One main feature of phenomenological research is that it always begins in the lifeworld with all its multifarious aspects (van Manen 1990). Within this lifeworld are human beings naturally engaged in their worlds.

And, in order to access and interrogate the lifeways of these advanced practice nurses, a return to the bedside to 'get back to the things themselves' was deemed essential. To this end, I entered the clinical world to study the CNSs (nine in all) in their surgical work settings in a large inner-city teaching hospital (in NSW) over a period of time (10 weeks) spanning one year. The CNSs were asked to share with me and the other participants their ideas and thoughts about life as a clinical nurse specialist in individual and small group interviews arranged at suitable times. Furthermore, in an effort to gain impressions about their role in differing ways, I sought to dialogue not only with the CNSs but also with patients as recipients of their care.

As it turned out, the CNSs showed a surprising commitment to the subject and the research question. As I had perhaps anticipated, many of them felt undervalued in their roles and the conversations presented a rare opportunity for them to relate their actual experiences to an interested party. Most of the CNSs were quite willing to find time for the conversations even on busy shifts. As the study progressed and as the CNSs and I became more involved, the conversations tended more towards what van Manen (1990, p.98) would call 'talking together like friends'.

Van Manen (1990, p.62) tells us that the deeper goal of phenomenology is to remain oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon as an 'essentially human experience'. And so I endeavoured to go into the field with what has been described as a phenomenological attitude - a willingness to 'open' myself to another's experience and consider the whole frame of existence which the other occupies (Spiegelberg 1975). This required that I adopt the 'kind of thinking' that would guide me back from 'theoretical abstractions to the reality of lived experiences' (van Manen 1990, p.44).

I went into the field believing that I was not primarily interested in the subjective experiences of my informants for the sake of reporting their particular views, perspectives or vantage points, but would try to get them to search for the meaning of CNS as a phenomenon they were experiencing.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as I understand it, is also about problematising perspective and encouraging people to look at their thoughts, ideas and beliefs in a different way. In other words, to get beneath taken-for-granted concepts about the world and to see phenomena in a new light.

I did not want to recreate a textbook image of the world of the CNS in terms of a recital of the nursing they had learnt in class. Not for example, that the role of the CNS (as one hospital role description states) is to 'provide the highest standard of total patient care by utilising clinical, educational and organisational skills ...' and so on. Rather, they needed to be encouraged to look at their working world in a way that would unveil concealed meanings in the phenomenon CNS. To describe the world as it presented itself to them. Thus, attempts were made to get behind the everyday meanings of their role to discover new sense, new meaning out of being a CNS (Crotty 1996). By way of example, having observed one of the CNSs performing quite an intricate dressing, I asked her what she found pleasurable in such a task, to which she replied:

> . . . fiddling with drains, unblocking them and cleaning them out, and getting them going again. Sometimes you have to cut bits off and try and draw clots out. That's quite good fun - getting it to go, and trying to work out why it's leaking and plugging up holes ...

Lived experience material may be found in differing media (van Manen 1990, Crotty 1996), and so each CNS was given a journal in which to inscribe her/his reflections about significant aspects of her/his working life. I also maintained such a journal. In addition, each CNS was approached to write a 'poem' about her/his workworld, to draw conceptual maps of the culture of this world together with other strategies designed to 'get to' immediate experience.

The following extracts are presented as examples of the material gathered. In the first, the CNS is relating to me her experience of removing a set of difficult sutures:

> I knew it was going to be a problem, I've encountered them before. It can be a bit niggly because most of the groin sutures get a bit like that. They can be removed; you just have to get that stitch cutter right in there.

In the next example, a CNS reveals her 'hidden' expertise as she describes an incident in which she asks a junior doctor to review a patient whose wound is seeping:

> ... anyway he [the intern] came up and had a look and he was just flapping around and didn't know quite what to suggest ... I knew that he would have rung the 'first-on' and, if the 'first-on' was a bit doubtful, he would have rung the surgeon at home,

> and that's a bit daunting. So I said to him, 'Do you think it would help if we put a pressure pad on?' 'Oh, yes', he said, 'that's it. Put a pressure bandage on it.'

Away from periods in the field was a time for sorting the material gathered, and then followed the analysis, an interpretive process that was carried out in interrelated stages and culminated in the development of what I have called a phenomenological text (narrative). For 'to do human science research', van Manen (1990, p.78) tells us, 'is to be involved in the crafting of a text.' In order to structure the meaning of the text, it is necessary to conceive of the phenomenon described in the 'data' as 'approachable in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes' (p.78). Analysing real life material, van Manen (1990, p.86) asserts, is a process in which 'we try to unearth something "telling", something "meaningful", something "thematic"'.

Each of the conversation transcripts was read several times and the lived experience material separated out. During this process I was immersed in the data, living with the CNSs' stories and anecdotes, so that they became known almost by heart. Text, however, that was not an anecdote or story was not discarded but looked at to decide whether or not it had potential to reveal complexity. While there is no doubt the stories, the anecdotes, provided 'thick descriptions' that were vivid and enshrined in a real context, other material still had a 'ring of truth' about it, and impacted on the study and was thus included (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.10).

The extrapolated text was then sorted into various themes utilising van Manen's (1990, p.93) approaches to uncovering thematic elements of a phenomenon in the 'data'. Initially, the existential themes of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and communality (lived relationship to other) were used as a framework to guide this process. From the initial stages of sorting, three broad themes emerged: (a) Being-in-the-world as a CNS; (b) Relationship with Others; and (c) the Patients (necessarily in this order). Once the themes had been identified, they were reflected on to provide even deeper understanding. From these themes emerged sub-themes into which the original existentials were interworked. Figure 5 provides a few examples of the themes and sub-themes generated from the transcript material.

One sub-theme generated from this study was 'Living with death'. A CNS describes her experience as:

> We had the death of a patient last week and, when I saw this man, I thought, 'Well, here we go again!' It's just tragic ... and

> you have to go through the whole routine with his wife again. Coming to terms with it, and you don't know what stage she is at, and whether she is still hoping he will get better ... you have to go through all that sadness again ...

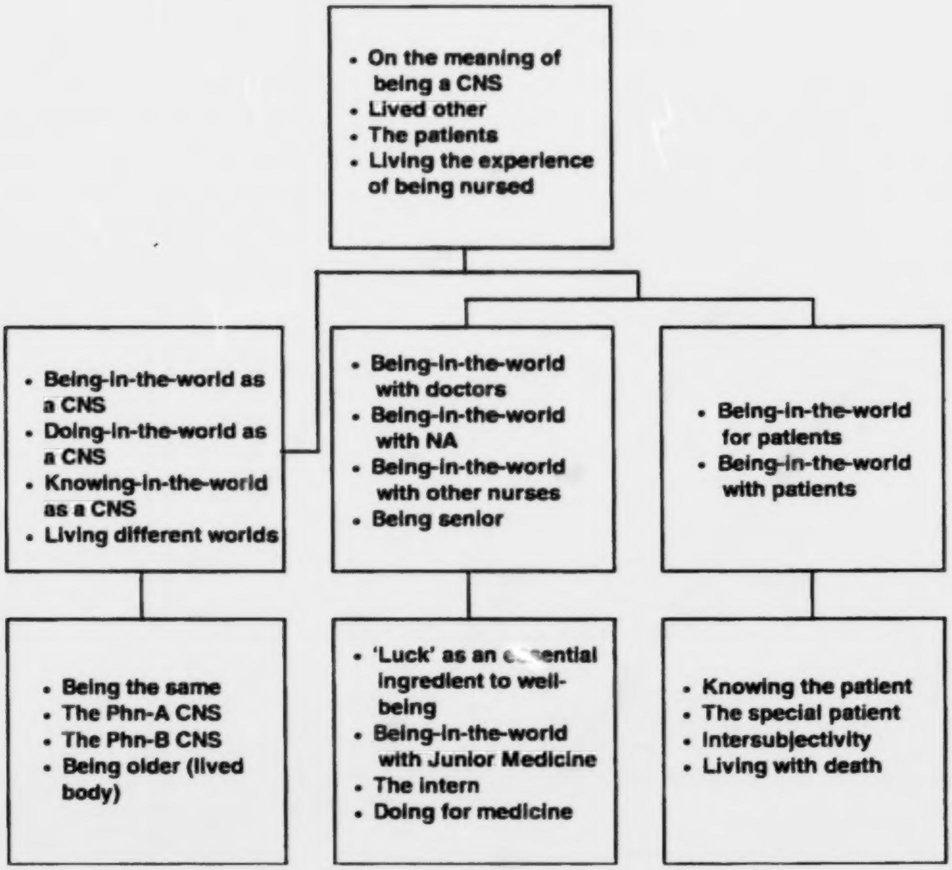
• On the meaning of being a CNS
• Lived other
• The patients
• Living the experience of being nursed
• Being-in-the-world as a CNS
• Doing-in-the-world as a CNS
• Knowing-in-the-world as a CNS
• Living different worlds
• Being-in-the-world with doctors
• Being-in-the-world with NA
• Being-in-the-world with other nurses
• Being senior
• Being-in-the-world for patients
• Being-in-the-world with patients
• Being the same
• The Phn-A CNS
• The Phn-B CNS
• Being older (lived body)
• 'Luck' as an essential ingredient to well-being
• Being-in-the-world with Junior Medicine
• The intern
• Doing for medicine
• Knowing the patient
• The special patient
• Intersubjectivity
• Living with death

Figure 5

Writing a phenomenological text requires a commitment to writing and rewriting (van Manen 1990). Having isolated essential material and identified emergent themes, the process of writing the phenomenological description began. This required a 'dialectical going back and forth between the parts and whole in order to arrive at a crafted piece of work' that in some way reflected my personal 'signature' (van Manen 1990, pp.131-132). And, although there is 'no compelling reason to structure a phenomenological study in any one particular way' (van Manen 1990, p.168), the study proceeded into phenomenological writing by using approaches suggested by van Manen (1990, pp.168-272).

That is to say, the phenomenological writing was organised *thematically* around global themes such as 'being', 'knowing' and 'doing'-in-the-world as a CNS; *analytically*, by reworking lived experience material into a 'reconstructed story' of the life of the CNS (van Manen 1990, p.170); *exemplificatively* by making visible the essential nature of the workworld of the CNS and by 'systematically varying the example' (p.171); and *existentially* by weaving the phenomenological description of the lifeworld of the CNSs against the existentials of lived time, space, body and other. Finally, the combination of approaches as outlined above has resulted in a textual structure that could be said to have been *invented* (p.173). But, as van Manen (1990, p.173) points out, 'human science research as writing is an original activity' and, although the style of presentation is unique, the integrity of the original experience remains intact.

Thus, by way of example, the sub-theme 'Living with death' (utilising the aforementioned techniques) was written up in the style shown in the box on the following page.

The phenomenological text constructed in this study and exemplified in this box attempted to uncover the essential nature of the phenomenon, that is the CNS. It was, in a sense, a narrative that borrowed the CNSs' words (presented in *italics*) and combined their voices not only with each other but also with my interpretations in an effort to provide a coherent understanding of their lived experience. And, while phenomenology does not purport to get at the 'ultimate' truth, it does seek to illuminate and transform lives through such illumination. The text recreates a lifeworld, revealing aspects often not considered before. In other words, it brings new meaning to taken-for-granted realities. The glimpses of their lifeworlds presented in the passages of the text should provide insights for the informants themselves and other CNSs to grasp in a reawakening of their experience.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that, because the CNSs were/are participative and constitutive of their social world, there emerged a critical emphasis on the contexts in which they practice. This meant that the text created from the descriptions of their experience/s describes not only the nature of being in the CNSs' nursing but also highlighted the complex social and political contexts in which they practise. In fact, the repressive aspects of their social order became quite evident, perhaps only naturally because they were aspects of their reality they tended to focus on (it has been argued that one cannot '*be*' in a culture-free way). So, although in this study the main influencing factor was hermeneutic phenomenology and the resultant text phenomenological, these relational issues gave the study a more critical perspective and it could be said that a combined perception-ethnographic-phenomenological framework underpinned the study's processes.

On Rose Ward the CNS will tell you, '*our patients face death, and the likelihood of death constantly and therefore we face it with them'*. In which case she spends time comforting and supporting patients and their families through some very difficult times, and mental counselling - keeping the human spirit alive - plays a major part in her role. The CNS recognises it is often not in-depth counselling the patient requires, just someone who can empathise with what is happening to them and listen to what they have to say. Someone to be present who allows the patient to take part once again in the life they used to know (van den Berg 1966). Carol describes a night she spent with Daisy; a relatively young woman with school-age children, who is dying of her disease:

> *On this night I sat with her for about an hour in the TV room where she tried to get comfortable in the 'Chair'. . .We talked about family and school and home and general things, as well as her illness and treatment. We talked about what a 'good bloke' her doctor is. We talked about positive thinking and I told her stories of other patients whose quality of life was enhanced by a positive attitude. We skirted around the subject of death ...*
>
> *Privately I admired her guts and wondered what I would be like in her situation. I made her a cup of tea and prepared to leave to do some work. Then, suddenly, she said how much she appreciated my talking to her - not just now but always, since her early admissions, and that sometimes, when I was on days off, she felt she needed me.*

Notwithstanding, the so called phenomenological text created out of this study presents the 'life' of the CNS based on phenomenological ideals. And a phenomenological 'way of looking at the world' informed the study's approach.

Dreyfus (1991, cited in Benner 1994, p.xvii) makes the point, as does van Manen (1995), that the validity of a phenomenological interpretation is demonstrated when the informant turns to the researcher and says, 'You have put into words what I have always known but did not have the words to express.' Hence, phenomenological descriptions come out of experience and are validated by experience.

The text should enlighten and assist nurses, nurse academics, students of nursing, policy makers and decision takers to more fully understand the practice of the advanced practice nurse, and should make the reader critically aware of some of the concrete concerns these nurses have.

In conclusion, it should be said of concrete concerns that the text certainly brought to light some cogent messages for the nursing profession to address, not least of those being that CNS could be an acronym for *Clinical Nurse Survivor.*

On a more positive note, it could also be said that the text has revealed many hidden elements in the job of the expert nurse (that is, of CNSing). This study substantiates the message *Nurses: We can't live without them*, a slogan generated by the NSW Health Department and appearing increasingly on car bumper stickers in that State. I would argue, however, that in order to acknowledge the essential nature of the work and world of advanced practice nurses, the logo be expanded to read: *Expert nurses: We can't live without them.*

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Chapter 13

The hidden spaces of adult literacy education: A phenomenological study of personal transformation

Beverley Campbell

In this paper I present the final conclusions of my recently completed Master's thesis, a study of personal transformation in adult literacy education, with a particular focus on the hidden spaces of the teaching-learning encounter. I describe how I used a phenomenological approach and cooperative research principles to explore the phenomenon of change as a human response. Some of the tensions of working with an emergent design are introduced as well as some of the challenges for the researcher in the project.

Interview as text - Three texts: The researcher, the adult literacy learner and the adult literacy teacher

> Yeah, um, I just, a coupla times, yeah, it has been a big change, it's been a big change in my life, yeah, in the last two years, since I been doin' it. Um sometimes you get sort of a bit of a feeling, you don't know if you're doin' the right thing, or, or, what you're doin, you know. (yes, yes) You'll sorta sit there and you'll think about it whether you're doin' the right thing, whether you're, it's a change, like you're changin' yourself. It's not just 'cause you're changing 'cause you can read and write, sorta thing. It's, it's, yourself, you're changin your whole self. (Interview 2 with Bill, par.4)

This quote exemplifies the phenomenon of change situated in an educational context that I was interested in researching: to find out how an adult's development of literacy could change a person's sense of self and consequently his/her life. The idea of change within the adult literacy education context had long been a particular interest of mine dating back to the time when I worked with adult literacy students. Initially, though, when I began this research project, I had no clear idea of how to go about researching the phenomenon of personal transformation. It was clear that I needed to interview people who had, it appeared, experienced change in their life as a result of being involved in adult literacy education. I wanted to explore how people changed, at the surface level, not only in their reading and writing but at a more profound level in their very sense of self, in their identity as a person.

The transcripts of three hour-long interviews - two separate interviews with an adult literacy learner, Bill, and an hour-long interview with one of his adult literacy teachers, Nancy - provided the data for this study. Nancy had been a student in a university adult literacy specialism course that I had taught and one of the assessment tasks for the course was to document the teaching-learning encounter with an adult literacy student. She was working with Bill at the time and chose to write her assignment about the literacy work they had done together.

As she described the changes Bill was experiencing, I recognised some of the characteristics of a process of personal change that I had observed or that had been recounted anecdotally about other adult literacy students. Nancy's documentation, evidence in other essays I read, and my own experience, confirmed for me that the process of change in the educational context was worth further exploration.

The intention of the study was to develop a theoretical framework as a means of articulating and understanding this process of personal transformation. Spradley (1979) says of language that it is 'more than a means of communication about reality: it is a tool for constructing reality.' (p.17). The language that I gathered in the interviews became then the vehicle by which Bill and Nancy were able to recount their experiences of learning and teaching and change in this context, thus providing the text for analysis and interpretation. My interest was in finding out how Bill and Nancy, from different perspectives, were constructing their experiences and understandings, their realities, of adult literacy education, of literacy and of change. The texts of Bill and Nancy were joined by my own voice, at one level also recounting my own experience of transformation in the educational context, and at another level in the analysis of the interview texts and my own shaping of the interpretation.

The metaphor of space in education

My desire to explore adult literacy education and the notion of personal transformation became focused on a particular interest in finding out what the 'essence of the lived experience' of personal transformation (van Manen 1984 and Giorgi 1989) was for one adult learner as he developed in his literacy and took on the construction of a literate self. As the study was nearing completion, I attended the LERN (Language in Education Research Network) conference in Townsville, July 1995. In a paper given by Assistant Professor Kris Gutierrez, University of California at Los Angeles, 'Script, counterscript and underlife in the urban classroom: Constructing a third space', (forthcoming, *Harvard Educational Review*), she presented the idea of the 'third space' as the non-negotiated space in classroom dialogue which belongs to neither teacher nor student. She described it as an uncomfortable space to be in for all concerned. It was the metaphor of space that I adopted as an appropriate one to frame this study of personal transformation.

The hidden spaces of adult literacy education

The use of the metaphor of space made me aware that I had been exploring four areas in this phenomenological study, which I have called the hidden spaces of adult literacy education. My interest lay not so much in what was being taught or learnt, but in how the context was being created for new understanding to take place, and how this in turn precipitated a process of personal change as a result of the learning that was taking place. Primarily, though, my concern was in finding a way of understanding the process of change, not only to discover what was happening but to provide a way of talking about a phenomenon which is most commonly reported anecdotally.

Firstly, this research provides a way of talking about the working relationship which develops between adult literacy teacher and adult literacy learner as a negotiated space in which new understandings occur and in which learning might take place. In order to do this it was necessary to set the study in the context of a reading of the metaphors in the literature (van Manen 1984). This search for the dominant metaphors in adult literacy pedagogy was important for several reasons. In discovering what is shaping pedagogy and practice in adult literacy education in the 1990s, I was able to provide a broader context for the more intimate study of one learner and one teacher. As well, the naming of the metaphors in the literature helped to identify the metaphors for literacy in which the teacher and the learner lived. Adult literacy teachers often live out of metaphors for literacy which shape their classroom practice but which are different from the metaphors for literacy out of which their adult learners live and from their expectations of literacy education. This conjunction of metaphors and expectations can be a dynamic and creative interaction or it can lead to resistance where the learner refuses to be engaged in the learning process. In this case, however, it was a positive and creative learning encounter in which the learner was presented with new metaphors for literacy and which resulted in a process of personal transformation.

The second hidden space to emerge in the process of this research was the space in which self-narrative is created. A theoretical understanding which provides a way of entering this particular space is offered by Bruner (1986) in his concept of 'the narrative mode of thought', which he contrasts with the 'logico-scientific mode of thought', Epston and White's (1989) 'text analogy', and Salmon's (1985) metaphor of 'life as narrative'. As a model for the interviews I used Bruner's study (1988) where he asked a series of people to tell the story of their life in a half-hour interview. He then studied the grammatical constructions in their life narratives to see how the participants in the study had constructed themselves autobiographically. My intention, however, was not to study the grammatical constructions in life narratives but to explore the metaphors and symbols which were prevalent in their life stories and how they had contributed to particular autobiographical constructions.

I adopted this understanding of the metaphor of life as narrative and at the first interview asked Bill to tell me the story of his life. What emerged, most powerfully, in the study of Bill's life story was that his life had centred around particular metaphors, of which the most recurrent was 'Life was hard'. Others which were part of this shaping metaphor were: 'If you're illiterate you're a vegie'; 'Because you can't read and write, other people see you as less than human'; 'You're on a level lower than everyone else if you can't read and write'. Up to this point these metaphors had given Bill's life coherence and continuity. During this period of personal change his life appeared to be in turmoil. Part of my thesis was a developing understanding that at the time of the study Bill's life narrative was suffering a disjunction where the dominant metaphors and symbols were no longer adequate, and the period of unrest he was experiencing was caused in part by the fact that he was having to renegotiate his shaping life metaphors.

Another space to emerge and which is interwoven throughout the thesis, is what I have called the space created by the dialectic between theories of social construction and personal construct theory. Bill's metaphor for literacy and indeed his sense of self had been shaped by past negative experiences of literacy and learning. He had not succeeded in learning to read and write and such was the power of the metaphor of schooled literacy that he took on the construction of failed learner that the school and his wider social context gave him. There will always be tension in this dialectic and the understanding offered by those who see reality as totally socially constructed and those who place the emphasis more on the self as active agent, and how the individual responds in new situations in the light of past experiences. There was no doubt that for many years Bill had been living with a legacy of past social constructions which had played a powerful role in defining his sense of self. He had reached a stage in his life where he felt compelled to change his life situation. The trigger to enrol in a literacy class was prompted by external pressures to change but there also seemed to be some inner compulsion causing Bill to act and change his circumstances.

The fourth space I identified as an important one for this study was that of the concept of the self. The work of Brian Street's (1992) cross cultural studies brought together the ideas of literacy and different concepts of personhood to show the role that literacy practices in different cultures might play in the creation of different concepts of 'self'. In the process of exploring the connection between literacy and self it was necessary to address the tension between social construction theorists and personal construct theory already mentioned, but there were further questions to be asked about the construction of self. Is the self, one's sense of personhood, totally socially shaped and constructed or more actively creative? Or is the self involved in a process of movement, emergent towards becoming a mature human being? And, if literacy practices are powerful socially shaping forces, what process of human response prompts us to move from and resist or take on one set of socially shaping practices for another?

The concept of metaphor

The concept of metaphor is used in two ways in the thesis. Firstly I pursued a path recommended by van Manen: to search for the dominant metaphors in the literature. I did this in relation to the literature on literacy which is informing and shaping current pedagogy and practice in adult literacy education. These emerged as seven dominant metaphors. This paper does not elaborate on these metaphors in any detail. The importance of the exercise, however, was that it became a tool for understanding the metaphors that Bill and Nancy had for literacy, and which in their dynamic interplay created the context for change to happen. Furthermore, it assisted me to articulate the metaphor for literacy which has shaped my own practice in my work with adult literacy learners. The second use of the concept of metaphor in the thesis is taken from the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and their category of ontological metaphor. I have used metaphor and symbol as a methodological tool in the examination of the language of the interview texts, particularly of Bill's language to find the prevailing metaphors and symbols in his life narrative.

Phenomenological research

A phenomenological approach allows the possibility of moving from description to interpretation, from language to meaning-making processes to show the construction of life narratives. Lather (1992) describes constructivist research as 'a paradigm of disclosure' (p.89). The phenomenological approach used for this study depended on the willingness of the participants to enter into this process of disclosure. The life narratives that the interviews elicited provided me with the data for exploring at many levels meaning-making processes, and in this context their focus on constructions of literacy and concomitant processes of personal change, and their connections with concepts of self and personhood. More importantly perhaps, this approach provides a way of acknowledging the subjectivities of those involved in the learning process. However, whilst the uniqueness of the person might be retained using this approach and the ownership of the narrative remains with the participants, the analysis and interpretation belong to the realm of the researcher. The question of representation remained an area of unease throughout the writing of the thesis.

Using a combination of van Manen's (1984) 'immersion in the data' and Giorgi's (1989) use of 'meaningful transformation units', I carried out a close textual analysis of the interview data. The validity of this research approach depends on this detailed textual analysis which, although necessary, is also extremely time-consuming.

From this analysis five major themes emerged which became the focus for the interpretation section: the shaping metaphors for literacy of Bill and Nancy, images for change, life in transition, self and literacy, and the context for change. There may be alternative readings of the interview data and other important themes to explore but those named above were the ones developed in the thesis.

The study truly was one of discovery and emergent concepts, of moving through a process of confusion and chaos to clarity and understanding. This was achieved firstly through the development of the narrative and the interweaving of the texts of Bill and Nancy, joined by my own, as researcher.

The detailed and intensive written analysis of the interview texts was accompanied by the development of a theoretical understanding in the literature review. That the thesis was about the four areas, the hidden spaces named above, only became clear at the end of writing the thesis. To reach this point involved making a choice about research methodologies as well as finding an appropriate way of exploring the process of personal transformation. A phenomenological approach as advocated by van Manen (*ibid.*) and Giorgi (*ibid.*) opened up the possibility of doing research to go beyond the surface events in behaviour, to explore some of the inner world processes which motivate the behaviour and which are such an intrinsic and exciting part of the educational process.

Challenges for the researcher

Although this study primarily used a phenomenological approach, it was also informed and influenced by developments in new forms of research, broadly called collaborative or cooperative research (Haug 1983, Reason 1988, Guba and Lincoln 1990, Lather 1991). In this research paradigm the researcher and the participants work together to construct new meanings. The purpose of my research project was to collect data for a Masters thesis, which placed constraints on the amount of collaboration possible. The research agenda was already set when I approached the participants about being involved. They were willing to be interviewed, to provide me with a narrative text for analysis, but the constructed narrative of the thesis and the analysis and the interpretation were mine. I was conscious always, as I wrote the analysis and then the interpretation, that I was asking of myself: 'Would I be happy if somebody were writing these things about me?' Although Bill had agreed to be involved in the study, it could, in fact, be seen to be an invasion of Bill's privacy. That will continue to be one of the tensions in the 'paradigm of disclosure'. Because of time constraints there were limits to the extent that the project could be fully collaborative.

Cunningham (1988) provides a model of holistic, interactive research based on collaboration, dialogue, experience, action research and contextual locating. In spite of the above constraints, from my point of view it was still important that the research process be informed by the principles of, and in the spirit of, collaborative research as advocated by Cunningham (*ibid.*) and that it be of some benefit to the participants. The interviews themselves, although providing a text for analysis, also provided Bill with an opportunity to reflect on the period of change he was experiencing prompted by his involvement in literacy classes. At the level of reflective practice it also provided Nancy with the opportunity to reflect on her own teaching practice and go beyond the description of her intuitive actions to articulating the tacit knowledge informing her practice.

Working with these relatively new methods in post-positivist research has implications for the training of new researchers looking for alternative ways of researching and documenting their research question. In these new research paradigms the role of the researcher changes from that of objective observer to that of active participant in the process.

Van Manen (no date) talks about a 'pedagogy of tactful action' in relation to classroom teaching practice. This idea of 'tactful action' could also be appropriately transferred to the context of the qualitative research interview situation. Making explicit appropriate behaviour and competence could become part of the training of new researchers within this research paradigm.

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Chapter 14

Doing phenomenology

Michael Crotty

As I have argued elsewhere (Crotty 1996), there is a world of difference between the phenomenology found in the traditional phenomenological movement (as detailed by Spiegelberg [1982], for example) and what generally passes for phenomenology today in the textbooks and research journals of the English-speaking world.

This latter form of phenomenology presents itself as an attempt to understand and describe people's subjective experience. For this to happen, we are told, things need to be seen from the other person's perspective. Researchers are urged to engage in a single-minded effort to 'bracket' their own presuppositions, prior knowledge and espoused viewpoints and allow the data to speak for themselves. There is much talk of *putting oneself in the place of the other*, which is sometimes styled 'the great phenomenological principle'.

For all that, the emphasis remains on common understandings and the meanings of common practices, so that phenomenological research of this kind emerges as an exploration, via personal experiences, of inherited and prevailing cultural understandings.

In contradistinction to this approach, the more traditional phenomenology invites us to ignore these culturally derived understandings. It bids us, instead, to return to our immediate experience of things. 'Back to the things themselves!'

This phenomenology, it should be noted, is necessarily a first-person exercise. One may read Spiegelberg's meticulous chronicle of the phenomenological movement from cover to cover but the 'great phenomenological principle' will not be found. No emphasis there on 'putting oneself in the place of others'.

Why should there be? This form of phenomenological inquiry is not a gathering of other people's narrated experience but an openness to our own in its immediacy. It is a revisiting of our experience in contemplative mode for the purpose of discovering, not how culture has taught us to understand phenomena, but how these phenomena immediately present themselves to us.

This is the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, who calls upon us to 'set aside all previous habits of thought' and 'learn to see what stands before our eyes' (1931, p.43).

It is the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, for whom phenomenological inquiry involves 'thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies'. Why? Because these tendencies conceal the entities we encounter '*as* encountered of their own accord *in* our concern with them' (1962, p.96).

It is the phenomenology of Ortega y Gasset, who requires that we ruthlessly cast aside the ideas that rule us and become like those lost at sea.

> The man with the clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face, realises that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth - that to live is to feel oneself lost - he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look around for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. (1932, p.170)

It is also the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenology which 'places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them' (1962, p.vii). If for Ortega everything in the world is to be taken as 'problematic', for Merleau-Ponty everything in the world is to be rendered 'paradoxical'. Accepted understandings have to be set aside because, 'in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical , we must break with our familiar acceptance of it' (1962, p.xiii).

Suspicion of culture

There are obviously many differences, and quite profound differences, between these two forms of phenomenology. One of the most striking is the attitude each evinces towards tradition and culture. While the 'new' phenomenology warmly embraces culturally derived understandings and explores them in sustained and incisive fashion, the traditional phenomenological movement is characterised by a thoroughgoing suspicion of culture and asks us to bracket the understandings it imposes on us. As Armstrong puts it:

> Phenomenology is much more than a suspension of assumptions. The phenomenological reduction is a change of attitude that throws suspicion on everyday experiences. (1976, p.252)

Why be suspicious of culture? Do we not owe it our very humanness? After all, it is because of culture that we are able to emerge from our immediate environment and reflect upon it. It is because of culture that we know our past and can plan our future. Culture surely has to be seen as liberating. Yes, indeed, and phenomenologists are happy to acknowledge that. Nevertheless, in their view it is limiting as well as liberating. It may set us free but it also sets boundaries. Culture may make us human but it does so in quite definite and circumscribing ways - in and through *this* particular culture, *this* special system of significant symbols, *these* meanings. In imposing these meanings, it is excluding others. Gabriel Marcel goes so far as to refer to cultural understandings as 'closed systems in which thought imprisons us' (1964, p.35), while John Wild underlines the need to 'escape from this imprisonment in a world of our own construction' (1955, p.191). A prison, yes, and a harsh prison at that, for the particular set of meanings which our culture imposes has come into being to serve particular interests and will harbour its own forms of oppression, manipulation and injustice.

Not only is our symbol system limited, limiting and, after its own fashion, oppressive, but it is also a barrier. It not only stands *for* things but comes to stand *between* things and us - more precisely, between us and our immediate experience of objects. In other words, it tends to exclude or at least inhibit the immediate experience of what we make sense of through it. It tends to substitute itself for what we actually see, hear, feel, smell, taste or even imagine. Thus, Ortega y Gasset describes our cultural understandings as 'masks' and 'screens' (1963, pp.59-63). We must strive to get behind these cultural barriers. They constitute 'a culture which has already become false'. The person living within it 'is in urgent need of another culture, that is to say a culture that is genuine' to replace 'the culture he has received from without'.

> So he has no course other than to rise up against that culture, to shake himself free of it, to rid himself of it, to retreat from it, so that he may once more face the universe in the live flesh and return to living in very truth. (1958, pp.100-101)

If Ortega y Gasset sees our culturally derived meanings as masks and screens, Kurt Wolff sees them as blindfolds.

> If we, sociologists or not, but we sociologists too, trust our senses, rather than the received notions that blind them, and thus us, to reality, the only way we can begin coming to terms with our 'paramount reality' is to say No to it, for, as Herbert Marcuse put it, '"The whole is the truth" and the whole is false'. (1989, p.326)

We can add Heidegger to this list. In fact, in his assessment of culture Heidegger proves the most scathing of all . For him, the understandings abroad in one's culture are the voice of *das Man* - the 'they, the anonymous One, the Others', and he dismisses them as nothing less than a seduction and a dictatorship (1962, pp.214, 164).

Merleau-Ponty shares this attitude. Far from displaying any interest in describing the culture that prevails, he looks to 'wild being', talks of rediscovering a 'brute mind... untamed by any culture', and seeks 'to create culture anew' (1964, p.181).

So phenomenology is about saying 'No' to our meaning system. It is about putting that meaning system in abeyance. Instead of inviting us to explore our everyday meanings as they stand, it calls upon us to lay them aside for the moment and to open ourselves to phenomena in their stark immediacy to see what emerges for us. True enough, the phenomena in their stark immediacy - the 'things themselves' - will prove elusive. In describing what comes into view within immediate experience, we necessarily draw on language and therefore on culture. Consequently, we end; not with a presuppositionless description of phenomena, but with re-interpretation. It will be as much a construction as the sense we have laid aside, but as re-interpretation - as new meaning or renewed meaning - it is precisely what we as phenomenologists are after.

By going back to the phenomena and having a fresh look at them, we are obviously calling our current meanings into question. As is often said, phenomenology *calls into question what is taken for granted*. Phenomenology, then, is critique. It is a critical methodology. This has been said many times over from the very beginning of the phenomenological movement.

- 'For it can be seen... that the science having the unique function of effecting the criticism of all others and, at the same time, of itself is none other than phenomenology... phenomenology, by virtue of its essence, must claim to be "first" philosophy and to offer the means for carrying out every possible critique of reason.' (Husserl 1970, Vol.I, p.45)

- 'Phenomenology is a reflective enterprise, and in its reflection it is critical.' (Larrabee 1990, p.201)

- 'Phenomenological philosophy is first of all philosophical criticism. Phenomenology is characterized (1) by the universality with which criticism is systematically practiced, and (2) by the affairs on which it is brought to bear... I disengage from a claim in order to criticise it... in the systematically adopted attitude of disengagement.' (Zaner 1970, pp.79-80)

This, then, is the basic invitation of phenomenology, the 'common core' that Spiegelberg finds among the broad-ranging vagaries of the phenomenological movement (1982, p.677): that we should lay aside for the moment our inherited and prevailing assumptions and meanings and look afresh to the phenomena to which these attach.

Can we do this? And what will happen when we do?

Merleau-Ponty, for one, is most sanguine about our ability in this respect - and about the outcome. That outcome, he tells us, will be an 'unmotivated upsurge of the world'; we will be able to 'watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire' (1962, p.xiv); we will find 'a wild-flowering world and mind... renewal of the world [that] is also mind's renewal' (1964, p.181).

This is heady stuff. If perchance we are aroused by such rhetoric, the question at once arises: how does one go about doing phenomenology of this kind? Are there steps one might follow?

Steps towards the goal

I have previously outlined a method of phenomenological inquiry that involves five successive steps (Crotty 1996, pp.158-170). These are not intended as a rigid or permanent framework but rather as scaffolding that may prove helpful to get some building underway.

Let us examine these steps, using 'stress' as the phenomenon in question.

Step 1 Determine as precisely as possible what phenomenon we are focusing on.

We put the question: what counts as stress?

Step 2 Consider the phenomenon precisely as phenomenon.

We take stress purely as phenomenon, ie as it appears in our experience of it, and ask ourselves: what is stress like?... what does stress strike us as being?

This requires that we...

- lay aside, as far as we can, all ideas, judgments, feelings, assumptions, connotations and associations that normally come into view for us when we think of this phenomenon

  We disregard, as far as we can, all the expositions of stress we have read, all the understandings of stress we have come to accept, everything we have come to associate with stress. We try to look on stress as if it were the first time we have encountered it.

- open ourselves to the phenomenon as the object of our immediate experience

  We focus on stress as a human phenomenon in a sustained and penetrating, but not discursive, fashion.

Step 3 Describe what has come into view for us.

We say what stress appears to be in our immediate experience of it (taking care to describe stress and not ourselves).

Step 4 Ensure the phenomenological character of this description.

We look closely at our allegedly phenomenological description and ask whether what we are saying of stress does genuinely stem from our experience of it as a human phenomenon. Or does it spring, rather, from some other source? ... from theories elaborated about stress? ... from associations with stress which we learned to make in the course of our socialisation and education? ... from ???

If what we are attributing to stress comes from anything other than our immediate experience of stress, we jettison it.

Step 5 Determine the essence of the phenomenon, ie the element or elements in the phenomenon as phenomenon that make it precisely what it is.

> *We ask: what is it, in our immediate experience of stress, that makes stress stress?*
>
> *If stress has appeared to us as 'this' and as 'that', how essential are 'this' and 'that'? Would it still be stress if 'this' and 'that' were not there?*

Intuiting the phenomenon

Tucked away in this account of the steps of phenomenological inquiry is the invitation to 'open ourselves to the phenomenon as the object of our immediate experience'. As the second phase of Step 2, it may appear swamped by everything else. In reality, it is the centrepiece of the entire procedure.

Opening ourselves to the phenomenon? Kurt Wolff uses the notion of *surrender* to describe this exercise. We become passive before the phenomenon, allowing it to grasp us and impress itself upon us. He characterises his approach as 'surrender-and-catch' (1984, 1989). We open ourselves to the phenomenon and then, like people fishing in the sea, we lift our nets to see what we have 'caught'.

Heidegger talks of *Gelassenheit*. It means a 'releasedness', a 'letting go and letting be'. He also makes much of the notion of *listening*. There is a passivity and receptiveness about the idea of listening that captures very well the attitude of phenomenological inquiry into a phenomenon.

A more visual notion is that of *contemplation*. It too suggests an open, receptive stance rather than the 'busyness' of discursive reasoning.

The exclusion of such busyness is what Spiegelberg has in mind (1982, p.693) when he reminds us, 'Phenomenology begins in silence'. Spiegelberg also relays to us (1982, p.280) what Max Scheler has to say about the matter:

> ... 'phenomenological philosophy is the very opposite of all quick-fix philosophy by mere talking. Here, one talks a little less, remains more silent, and sees more - even that part of the world which perhaps can no longer be talked about.'

In the light of all that, it may be helpful to describe the process of phenomenological inquiry in terms like the following:

1. I make sure that I am focusing on the phenomenon (*what* I am experiencing) and not on myself (the one experiencing).

2. I make a sustained effort to ignore all the usual understandings I tend to attribute to the phenomenon on which I am focusing.

3. To the very best of my ability, I focus on the phenomenon purely and simply *as I experience it* - to the exclusion of all else. I open myself to it. I surrender to it. I contemplate it. I listen to it.

To help me do this, I insert a word or phrase denoting the phenomenon ('stress', perhaps?) into each of the statements in the following list and attempt to complete them.

_________ is like...

What I discover in _________ is...

_________ can be described as...

I picture _________ as...

_________ feels like...

What comes to light when I focus on _________ is...

_________ strikes me as being...

What shows up when I think of _________ is...

_________ presents itself to me as...

I recognise _________ as being...

_________ sounds to me like...

What I see in _________ is...

_________ looks to me like...

What I detect in _________ is...

_________ seems to be...

What is uncovered when I focus on _________ is...

I depict _________ in graphic form as...

What unfolds for me as I dwell on _________ is...

When I gaze at _________, I see...

I depict _________ in poetic terms as...

The metaphor(s) that best convey _________ is (are)...

It is a long list. The statements are many. Yet they are really the same statement expressed over and over again in various ways. This is not mere repetition. At least some of these different formulations will have the capacity to evoke different dimensions of the phenomenon.

Describing the phenomenon

Completing such statements will not be easy. The difficulty does not lie merely in seeing 'what lies before our eyes' (which Husserl saw as a 'hard demand'), or knowing 'precisely what we see' (Merleau-Ponty said there was nothing more difficult to know than that). We will also experience great difficulty in actually **describing** what we have succeeded in seeing and knowing. When we attempt to describe what we have never had to describe before, language fails us. We find our descriptions incoherent, fragmentary, and not a little 'mysterious'. We find ourselves lost for words, forced to invent words and bend existing words to bear the meanings we need them to carry for us. This has always been characteristic of phenomenological description. We may have to be quite inventive and creative in this respect.

We may need to be somewhat 'poetic' too. Not that we need to write poems. 'Poetising' is not the same thing as writing poetry. However, it will surely prove helpful to put ourselves in poetic mood and to write in poetic vein. Writing prose places us at once under a host of constraints and at the mercy of innumerable conventions. We are compelled by the exigencies of prose writing to think logically and rationally - and therefore in modes heavily shaped by culture. A more poetic frame of mind can go some way at least in releasing us from that thraldom and allowing us to break with conventional ways of seeing and describing things.

An intriguing challenge, surely. Why not respond to it in careful and sustained fashion and see what happens?

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Part Four

Qualitative research practice

Chapter 15

Visible politics: Postgraduate study and adult education research

Sue Shore

Many Australian writers reflect liberatory themes in their adult literacy work. This paper focuses on a form of research, critical ethnography, which aims to reflect these themes in its design and the outcomes generated for its participants. I draw on the concept of an 'idealised framework' as a guide to practice. In this study the framework addresses the characteristics of critical ethnography and some guidelines for developing a reflexive approach to research methodology. My conclusions suggest the social and political aspects of literacy use, and research processes are key issues to consider in any research that believes it has a role to play in making visible the multiple causes of advantage/disadvantage.

In 1993 I presented an earlier version of this paper to a North American conference on Adult, Continuing and Community Education (Shore, 1993). In this paper I have tried to engage with some of the key issues which have influenced my subsequent research.

Introduction

For some time Australia has been experiencing economic reform processes that have positioned adult language, literacy and numeracy development (hereafter referred to as 'literacy'[1] development) at the heart of the retraining, and multi-skilling movement. Within this climate of economic reform 'literacy' is an essential ingredient in the move to improve productivity at home and at the same time position Australia as a viable competitor in the international marketplace. This situation creates mixed feelings among 'literacy' practitioners. For many years practitioners and advocates have called for more sophisticated understandings of 'literacy'. Recommendations in the policy document, *Australia's Language: The Australian Literacy and Language Policy (DEET 1991)* indicated plans to increase public awareness of the complexity of 'literacy' and expand the knowledge and research base on Australian 'literacy' provision. However the Australian adult 'literacy' field is still in a position where it needs to establish the nature and extent of 'literacy' difficulties as much as it needs to explore research into policy and practice.

My point here is that much of this work, irrespective of its agenda, is not explicit about the value-laden nature of research processes, or educational and social practices which sustain 'literacy' difficulties for many Australians.

Writings which challenge normalised views of Australian 'literacy' (for example, Bee 1989, Sanguinetti 1994, Lee *et al.* 1993, Shore *et al.* 1993 and Wickert 1991) offer much to adult 'literacy' practitioners at this time. Persuasive arguments underpinning the conservative forces of economic rationalism limit the vision of 'literacy' provision to industry and work-oriented learning outcomes; outcomes which often ignore the historical and political realities of teachers' and learners' lives. 'Literacy' is about more than 'earning' and, furthermore, limited 'literacy' ability is but one box on the checklist of abilities which provides a pathway to work. Research committed to challenging these prevailing views about the links between 'literacy' and work is problematic, though.

Since the early 1990s support for 'literacy' provision has shifted. The impact of the Training Reform Agenda has sharpened the focus on the need to improve basic 'literacy' and communication competencies which underpin many vocational and workplace practices. While some of this attention has increased policy development, provision and associated staff development needs, some researchers and practitioners are concerned that vocational and workplace provision has assumed the position of a dominant discourse.

I have some sympathy with these claims but believe it is equally important to attend to internal debates about the nature of teaching and learning across diverse learning settings. Such explorations should include what is actually being taught in different learning environments; which methodologies are being used; how they are aligned to theories of literacy and language learning and 'adult learning principles' underpinning practice; and how successful they are in achieving literacy outcomes.

While I am aware of the limits of ethnographic work I think that critical ethnography can provide rich description about learning settings which might help us to understand how students learn in diverse contexts. These investigations may illuminate the commonalities as well as the differences in learning in workplaces and other settings.

In particular, critical ethnography, which is the focus of this paper, has inherited a number of problems - first, from its association with conventional ethnography, and, second, because of its explicit politics and visible values which render it susceptible to criticism from those who believe research can be free of bias.

Research practice in the study I describe here was guided by an 'idealised framework' (Troyna and Foster 1988, p.297) influenced by the work of Patti Lather (1986a, 1986b, 1991a), Jane Kenway (1987) and Bob Smith (1990).

The 'idealised framework' I describe in this paper helped to ground me in a set of principles and beliefs about research which makes its political commitments visible. This was essential within a postgraduate course framework which was not always supportive of my needs to claim that visibility. The framework set up tensions, however, when practical decisions had to be made about closure in the various stages of exploring the literature, data production, analysis and writing up. Many of these decisions were not resolved satisfactorily within the constraints of the framework.

This paper expands on these tensions and proposes ways in which, as researchers with an interest in making our politics visible, we might develop reflexive designs that indicate how our practices influence what we read, ask, and 'find', and at the same time set up the possibility for us to genuinely change our mind and shift our focus as we ***engage*** with the research.

I have struggled here to find a way to name this practice. In a previous paper Foley (1994) describes this work as 'politically committed' and Lather (1986b) uses the term 'openly ideological'. In using the term 'visible politics' in the title of this paper I have drawn from both but want to emphasise the importance of making visible the ways in which all research has a political commitment - some ventures are just more conservative or radical than others in their politics. If research reflects dominant paradigms it can appear as 'natural' given that it seeks not to change the kinds of inequities I have been highlighting here in a ***visible*** *manner.*
In later work Lather (1991a) uses the term 'praxis-oriented'. Some of my more recent work (Shore forthcoming) adopts the central characteristics of this term, but I don't believe it is appropriate for the research described in this paper.

To show how this did (and did not) happen, I draw on my research experiences during a study undertaken in 1990 (reported in Shore 1991), which proposed that it is a teacher's questions that structure students' participation in adult literacy classroom discussion - an important component of many adult education classes and a crucial aspect of adult literacy development. I believed that adult literacy classes, like many adult education settings, made grand claims for egalitarian and collaborative environments but were in fact in danger of perpetuating asymmetric patterns of interaction between teachers and learners. I realised that a teacher's questions did not occur in isolation. The problem was to develop a research design which documented specific teaching practices, acknowledged the historical and institutional constraints shaping those practices, and honoured the teacher's involvement, given the impact of these constraints on her practice.

> *I came to this research with huge gaps in my understandings of research and the theoretical literature which would help me develop my interests in making visible the (conservative as well as more radical) politics of research. I found the language of critical theory resonated strongly with my interests in issues of (in)equality especially the "interlocking effects of power, privilege and oppression" (Tisdell 1993). Like many postgraduate students I came too late to the literature which offered critical analysis of some of the more entrenched positions of critical theory - my focus was on the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Colin Lankshear - a revealing selection to say the least!*
>
> *In the latter stages of the study I began to read feminist research and this gave me another language to articulate my interests in the politics of adult education. I came to realise that my own work had set up, much like that of the grand theorists, a practice which proposed a Truth and Reality, my Truth and Reality; this was at odds with my initial claims to work collaboratively with the teacher. While the initial readings were helpful they also caused imperceptible shifts in my thinking and orientation to the data, causing me to interpret the data in fairly deterministic ways...*

Idealised frameworks informing the research

Radical pedagogy and emancipatory practice were key themes in my initial reading. I knew that there were significant differences between and within research approaches guided by Marxist, feminist or critical social science concerns, and that these approaches shared some common themes: attention to 'critique', an interest in human emancipation, and a commitment to social change made explicit during the research process by attention to ideological values and beliefs driving the research (Kenway 1987).

A spirit of critique comes about through assuming that knowledge is produced through social interaction; therefore all knowledge and the processes by which it is produced are open to interrogation.

Furthermore, I accepted that social (dis)order is riddled with inequalities and that this asymmetry is legitimated and reproduced through language practices and ways of interacting which establish inequality as 'natural'. So individual people and social groups often remain unaware of how they collude to sustain asymmetric relations of power by using familiar language practices.

By adopting a spirit of critique, people involved in research can interrogate and destabilise patterns and structures which are presented as natural and therefore beyond the influence of individuals and social groups. Such an approach further underscores the significance of 'literacy' learning and research into that learning, since language is a key element in portraying the naturalness of social interaction.

...In fact, my continuing research is attempting to work across these complexities to recognise that research results are fundamentally influenced by who we are, where we come from, our locations as researchers (in the academy), and what we are trying to change - or keep the same. The latter is a crucial point given the apolitical ways in which heavily gendered, racialised and classed research in adult education is being presented these days as a neutral activity.

I also believe that the research processes we choose influence research outcomes and that research participants are affected by our intrusions into their lives (Lather 1991a).

From an emancipatory perspective researchers need to consider how research can avoid the pitfalls of locating participants as the 'other' - the objects of research - and be mindful of how helpful the outcomes will be for participants as they continue living their lives long after many of us have gone.

I kept returning to these issues during the fieldwork and later as I struggled to analyse the data in ways that would assist the teacher.

I intended to describe the research as 'critical ethnography'. However, there are a number of reasons why the final report and elements of the process do not constitute an ethnography as conventionally defined. Conventional interpretative ethnographies organise and explain social interaction using researcher descriptions based on collected data and perspectives of the participants. Critical ethnography builds on this; it

> transforms this procedure into a particular one by supplying it with additional perspectives, principally historical and structural, that alter the ethnographic project toward one which supports an emancipatory ... concern (Simon and Dippo 1986, p.201)

Critical ethnographies, like conventional ethnographies, present descriptions and analyses of social interaction from multiple perspectives, guided by the

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structural arrangements and individual perspectives coexisting within a culture. However, these descriptions and analyses begin with the contention that inequality is embedded in social interaction and analysis aims to reveal the ways in which social interaction perpetuates patterns of dominance. To this end, critical ethnographers do not collect data, rather they 'produce' (Simon and Dippo 1986, p.200) data about social relations and this in turn reveals the multiplicity of ways in which inequality is played out in daily life. The purpose of this data and its interpretations is to offer insights rather than present a framework with predictive power.

Critical ethnography offers other insights as well. Participant understandings of social relations may not always reveal the complexity of competing interests or the ways in which individual behaviour subverts emancipation. When critical ethnographers 'generate insights', 'explain events' and 'seek understandings' (Anderson 1989, p.253) their purpose is to reveal not only what is said but also what is left unsaid about understandings of social reality. Anderson notes that participants' 'reconstructions of social reality are often permeated with meanings that sustain powerlessness and people's conscious models exist to perpetuate as much as to explain, social phenomena' (1989:253). Critical analyses of such reconstructions tell us what we do as individuals to resist and contest, as well as sustain, relations of power. From this perspective participant recollections alone are inadequate, as are designs which focus solely on empowering strategies. They offer a partial picture of social interaction, but to be more comprehensive they must include structural analyses and potentially disempowering practices as influential themes in educational practice.

So critical ethnographies offer additional perspectives which allow contradictory patterns of social interaction to be explored (but not predicted) within a theoretical framework which acknowledges the asymmetric nature of classroom power relations.

'But additional perspectives are neither emancipatory nor illuminating if they silence or marginalise the realities of participants' lives. Both Ellsworth (1989) and Clarke (1990) elaborate on the dangers of emancipatory research which loses sight of the needs of participants when it adopts a deterministic position in relation to the data. This should be a real concern for those of us who have a fair degree of power as researchers and find that our data does not quite 'fit' our radical theorising. We need to find ways to rethink/destabilise this position of 'privilege' as the data demands. Such concerns must be foregrounded in research designs and practices which aim to be responsive to participants' needs.

This admittedly brief review of conventional and critical ethnographies is supported to some extent by Hammersley (1992). However, he also suggests that the criticisms of conventional ethnographies which I outline here are rather narrow and reflect a limited view of conventional ethnographic work. Such critiques merely point to the fact that conventional ethnographies are not critical ethnographies; this obscures debate about the usefulness of conventional ethnography as a form of social research and masks the methodological difficulties critical ethnography has inherited as it seeks to move beyond conventional explanations of social interaction. My own attempts at research using ethnographic methods and critical analysis suggest that a framework which is explicit about relations of power and the role of the researcher in producing social knowledge is a useful point from which to begin to understand and re-create one description of the life of a group. Doing this as part of higher degree study creates its own tensions and at times limits the degree of fit between ideal visions and actual practice.

I thought my study would be ethnographic because I intended to 'live with' and describe the culture of an adult literacy teacher's professional life. I wanted to reconstruct her time with the adult literacy group as it unfolded during the 10 weeks of the study[2]. I believed the study was critical because a central element of analysis involved examining the way in which participation and negotiation in the class were structured explicitly and implicitly through the teacher's questions. I was interested in analysing the constraining as well as empowering potential of the teacher's practice. In addition, I wanted to place her practices within an historical framework acknowledging the *ad hoc* development of Australian literacy provision and staff development. Critical ethnographic research seemed to offer a means of doing this.

Moving towards the ideal

The idealised framework I have described above is complex and time consuming in terms of research practice. In many ways I think it sets up unrealistic expectations of a research process, given the academic, professional and personal demands of higher degree study. Its complexity is not evident in the brief labels affixed to research methods and this complexity is reflected in other research

Since finishing this study I have supervised and marked research projects which fit under the umbrella of "a thesis in part fulfilment of the requirements of a Master of Education". As adult education departments in Australia increase their postgraduate quotas I believe we will have to address the very real issue of what constitutes a viable piece of research for a 'project' thesis and how supervisors encourage a degree of fit between the expectations and the product...

approaches similarly collapsed into a few words (e.g. action research and 'the' case study).

In essence I used ethnographic methods based on the limited methodological literature on critical ethnography available at the time. (See Anderson 1989, Brodkey 1987, Simon and Dippo 1986, and Thomas 1983). *(Since then I have found Thomas [1993] to be helpful - why wasn't it around when I needed it!)*

> *...At the same time it is fair to say that many adult educators come to postgraduate study with the intention of investigating a 'problem' which has been shaped by their history and experience as an adult educator. This situation is not always conducive to identifying a viable thesis topic.*

I undertook the field work in May-June 1990, with an adult literacy class consisting of predominantly women learners. The class was offered in a South Australian Technical and Further Education College over a 10-week block for three hours, once a week. I acted as participant-observer during class periods. I interviewed the teacher and students, and participated in one staff development meeting. Raw data consisted of reflective journals, field notes, and transcripts of the tape-recorded classroom discussions, a staff development activity, and teacher and student interviews. These were analysed and written up to present my perspective on classroom interaction in this study.

Two key concepts, reflexivity and critique, were central to the way I went about the research and the decisions I made. I have talked briefly about critique in a previous section of this paper and now need to elaborate on my understandings of reflexivity. A reflexive approach enables researchers to modify the research process on the basis of insights emerging from the data and idiosyncrasies of the research design. But I had a limited idea of what this involved before I began. Critique and reflexivity are not separate processes and operationalising reflexivity is a 'journey into uncharted territory' (Lather 1986a, p.267).

Throughout this study I used Lather's guidelines to develop a reflexive and reciprocal relationship between the researcher, the teacher and the data produced. This included:

- establishing correctives to my understandings
- challenging the naturalness of social arrangements as found in the classroom

- being explicit about contradictory practices in research and teaching processes
- including teacher insights in emerging analyses
- attempting to use emerging understandings to inform both teaching and research practice.

Briefly, my reflexive strategies included some 'member checks' (Guba and Lincoln 1985) to confirm, correct or elaborate on summaries of classroom events and the factors influencing the teacher's practice; peer reviews with critical friends and a 'peer debriefing' exercise (Guba & Lincoln 1985) to challenge my own practice and emerging analyses of the data; guided interviews which recycled my interpretations of the data and explored the teacher's intentions during class activities and her own interpretations of her practice; explicit challenges to apparently natural teaching practices such as turn taking and individual programming for self-directed learners and the teacher's responses to these challenges. I have expanded on these strategies in the original report (Shore 1991) and have not pretended that there are easy solutions to the dilemmas posed for researchers with financial limitations or time restrictions. But time and professional or domestic demands were not the only factors which influenced my practice. Many of the decisions I made were driven by strongly held beliefs, unarticulated at the time, about the nature of 'real' research, in addition to what can best be described as my novice researcher status. Time and funding are factors which limit possibilities in any research endeavour. However, I believe these are peripheral to factors such as prior theorising and pre-existing conceptual frameworks I brought to the research process.

These dot points and the strategies below seem so uncomplicated as I re-read them now. At the time I remember thinking that I was having to re-learn a whole set of expectations and practices. Since then I have become much more sceptical of simplistic notions of reflexivity which seem to separate the intellectual/mind processes of reflection from the deeply embodied emotions associated with challenges to my theoretical and practical premises. In taking up these challenges I had to let go of many preconceptions about research, power and education for social change.

In original reports of this project I described a small study group with whom I met to reflect on my research. The two other women in this group did not let me off the hook when it came to challenging the way I conducted the research. But, and this is a big but, they did work with me to understand what this type of research might look like in the flesh and helped me to make the sometimes grandiose claims of educational critical theory more viable.

As an example, I began the research with a particular questioning framework in mind, developed initially by Nina Wallerstein (1983) for use with non-English speaking background (NESB) learners. I used this framework initially as a way to simplify my entry to the data; however, it didn't achieve this aim. It took some time of observing and discussion with the teacher before I jettisoned this framework as counterproductive to my aims and purposes in analysing the teacher's questions. I found it difficult to share emerging analyses with the teacher because of the specificity of the framework. Initially the teacher seemed to ask few questions of the type proposed by Wallerstein and, in terms of the responses I could offer, this made her practice appear deficient. Second, when analysing the data, I was guided by central themes in critical social science research: What is missing? What is not happening? Where are the gaps and silences in the data and how have I interpreted these? During interviews with the teacher this approach created problems precisely because of its attention to what was not there. I believe this set up tensions between what was happening and what could, or should, be happening. Again this inadvertently undermined the teacher's work because my perspective was legitimated by my researcher status - a status which was admittedly novice, but I had yet to convince the teacher of this.

On reflection, I believe many of my desires for collaborative and participatory research were unrealistic and for a range of reasons it was difficult to map ideal and actual practices. In addition to the fact that it was 'my' thesis, and therefore not something the teacher had an ongoing commitment to, there were some contradictions between the notion of a collaborative framework and the literature on critical ethnography. I wanted to collaborate with the teacher and create a process which would be as helpful for her as it was for me. These collaborative ideals got in the way of the critical ethnography approach which I used and which in the end was guided by a researcher (me), who provided data for a participant (the teacher), to review and act on in the process of working towards developing her own understandings of her teaching (Smith 1990).

From this point of view the emancipatory work of a critical ethnographer may be neither participatory nor collaborative in terms of the procedures involved in data production. Eileen Willis drew this point to my attention and helped me to clarify the source of some of the tensions which grew out of my desires to work in a participatory manner and the ambiguous guidance available at the time on critical ethnographic approaches.

Lather's five guidelines for reflexivity, as well as the research processes advocated by Guba and Lincoln, gave me strategies for being more public about the private aspects of research work as I balanced my ideal practices with a set of actual practices which would enable me to complete the research.

Conclusions

Despite its problems and complexities, I believe critical ethnography offers much to 'literacy' practitioners and other adult educators at a time when dominant educational discourses seek to co-opt liberatory concerns as part of an agenda for national productivity. In the current political and economic climate of Australian education, Bagnall (1991) believes quantifiable 'outcomes-driven' approaches result in programs which 'trivialise' education and reduce 'wisdom and understanding to ... information, bodies of knowledge to facts, crafts to skills, sensitivity to behavioural acts and human virtues to attitudes' (Bagnall 1991, p.2). Adult education, and in particular adult 'literacy' teaching and learning, is much more than the sum of these parts.

Critical research frameworks magnify the significant differences between 'literacy' for functional purposes and the kind of political literacies required to see beyond current thinking, which often conflates 'literacy' skill and employability. The research we undertake to progress thinking about the nexus between 'literacy' use, disempowering practices and (in)equality must be based on principles which acknowledge the socially produced ways in which particular forms of 'literacy' are valued above others and how different social groups benefit in this process.

In this study an idealised research framework underpinned by notions of explicit ideology, ethical responsibility to participants and a collaborative mode of investigation, set up many tensions which were often not easily resolved in practice. To forestall some of these problems, I used a reflexive approach to the research and incorporated strategies which made public the values guiding my research decisions. The process was subjected to scrutiny by colleagues and the participating teacher as it evolved.

In taking these steps, I moved away from a paradigm that had shaped much of my previous learning and social life. It felt uncomfortable and it challenged some deeply embedded beliefs I had acquired about 'proper' research, which remains free of any researcher influence.

The results of this study were not intended to have predictive power. My analyses offer insights into how a teacher's questions structure participation in one adult literacy classroom. To be of use to other practitioners, the analyses must make explicit the values and practices of the research process, the dilemmas posed for me as a researcher, how I resolved these dilemmas and how, in resolving them, I also influenced the outcomes of the study.

> *Thanks are due to Joelie Hancock, Vicki Crowley and Jo Kijas who challenged my thinking in early drafts of this work, to the teacher and students who participated in the study and welcomed me as part of their class, and to Eileen Willis for long conversations about what critical ethnography might be.*

Notes

1. This is a simplistic conflation especially with developments in the field which recognise the interconnectedness between language learning and literacy, and the importance of making space for a specific form of learning related to numeracy practice. I use 'literacy' (with quotes) to indicate this meaning and literacy (no quotes) more specifically to refer to the class described in this study, which was for all intents and purposes a literacy class, that is, a class *focused on developing writing habits*, which acknowledged the importance of language to this development.

2. See Rist (1980) and Hammersley (1992) for discussions of ethnographic processes. Time, depth of engagement, and presentation of the report as a descriptive study, rather than narrative, are the key reasons why I believe it is difficult to label this study a critical ethnography. Instead, I called it a description and analysis of a teacher's questions using ethnographic methods and informed by critical theory analysis. This evades the issue to a certain extent but also draws attention to the problems associated with labelling research methods.

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Chapter 16

John Thomas, the *Meno* and research

Leslie Claydon

I intend in what follows to raise again certain puzzlements and dilemmas accruing to the trend towards what is sometimes referred to as post-positivist methodology. I say that I will raise them *again* so to be clear that I do not claim discovery of them nor yet to provide an entirely new critique. I raise them once more because I have found them to recur where, perhaps, it is a surprise to find them. They appeared in two recent PhD proposals. They also occurred within a dialogue between myself and a colleague who has been researching and teaching in the field of psychological counselling. He is working with me upon a paper for a learned journal which examines a newly published theory of counselling.

Guidance to both the identification and the clarification, if not resolution, of the puzzlements and dilemmas came from a quite unexpected quarter. John Thomas is a noted contemporary classical scholar who has spent much time studying the Platonic dialogues, the *Meno* in particular. I hope to show that his work has relevance to the problems considered in this paper. In my view his analysis of what he terms 'the "What is X?" question' does much to illuminate the difficulties encountered in the three instances with which this paper deals. It does so, I believe, in a way that the researcher lacking a specialist knowledge and comprehension of philosophical phenomenology is assisted to adjust to a methodology that is identified with the broad, (and in itself not entirely unproblematic), category of post-positivism. It does so in a way that does not require a constant retreat from the research topic in order to deal with methodological and logical ramifications which increasingly assume close acquaintance with the very areas that research candidates in such fields as education, the health sciences, much of social science and the humanities, not to mention the physical sciences, have not studied in any depth. The difficulties demanding this diversion are in the main to do with what Paul Ricoeur in the introduction to his book, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (1967), calls 'the totality formed by the ego and the surrounding world in which it is vitally engaged'.

As in many other universities, the PhD candidate in La Trobe's School of Education typically begins by formulating his/her research proposal and presenting it to a gathering of appropriate staff and post-graduate students. At this point the candidate encounters opinions additional to those of the supervisors, which may well view the research from perspectives other than those so far encountered or envisioned. Given the essential condition of absence of stressful invigilation, this can greatly stimulate and benefit the candidate, especially if he/she actively participates - perhaps initiates - critical dialogue within the group upon the proposal that has been presented.

Being one of such a group also provides one with an opportunity to identify the sort of issue that appears to beset researchers. One is afforded the chance to learn from what has resulted from the interaction of the supervisors and the candidate over a period of time during which much time and thought has been given to questions of methodology as a tool for elucidating a research topic. Therefore I shall now briefly outline two such instances.

In the first presentation I wish to consider the advance notice informing the would-be group member that the topic to be researched concerned the impact of change upon a section of the post-secondary system of education, institutions which had, in the recent past, been accorded the status of university. After a colon in the suggested title there followed a clause which indicated that the 'perceptions of tertiary educators within these institutions were to be researched'. There then followed a section entitled 'Statement of the problem' in which it was stated that the intention of the work was to 'determine the relationship between how these educators thought of society and institutional change, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the actualities of change in the institutions in which they worked consequent upon the change of status implied by the designation of 'university'.

It is not fitting to detail the proposal in ways which would permit identification of it or its originator. Further description is therefore somewhat restricted in its detail. The proposal set forth a number of research questions centring upon what academics thought to be the major institutional changes that were occurring, how their view of society led them to assess these changes and whether their judgements were influenced by the fact that they were 'situated at different levels within the institution'. There was then a section which 'backgrounds' the problem. It reported upon the developments which brought about the change of status to that of university. An historical account covering a decade or more of governmental and other initiatives was provided.

All to the good. One may note that it all reflects that totality of Ricoeur's which has been mentioned previously, of ego and the surrounding world in which it is vitally engaged. Certainly, one discovered, most in the group intending to participate in the presentation discussion were of this view. The advance document made clear that there had been changes in an institution in which numbers of people would be variously affected and have varying consequential assessments of the happenings.

Finally, there was a section on the literature so far considered, together with a bibliography. It reflected Ricoeur's totality also. There were works on the management of organisations, on the characteristics of academic life, and about how one gained knowledge of one's physical and social worlds. With all this as advance information, one felt that one knew what the parameters of the discussion would be.

It did not work out quite like that when the candidate spoke to the proposal. Observation of the group's body-language and their conversation following the discussion revealed increased surprise at what was being said as the session went on. As was indicated by quiet murmurs of assent to a comment made early in the discussion following the candidate's talk, the audience progressively formed the view that Ricoeur's totality had been riven into two parts, one of which was all but ignored. The candidate spoke more and more of cognitive development, personality factors, and so on, until remarking some way through the talk that the central focus of the research was 'a study of individuals within organisations'. Since this was the case, the candidate then concluded, considerations about the effectiveness and the value of the changes within the institution were outside the scope of the research.

The second presentation I wish to outline has some important differences to the first. To begin with, the candidate was a mature student of over forty years whose background was of part-time study as a mature student. He had gained admission to PhD candidature by way of a Masters degree obtained by coursework and minor thesis in which little had been required by way of study of research methodology. Upon admission to candidature he had therefore taken a course in research methodology which focused upon naturalistic enquiry and its techniques.

The research was to study curriculum change in primary schools with particular reference to proposals for a national curriculum. The advance notice proposed inquiry into:

1. what curriculum changes were being made to school programmes
2. why these changes were being made

3. how school communities were making them

Much of the section on the literature focused upon the skills required by 'educational change agents'. There was also lengthy reference to factors facilitating change, the administrative or organisational impetus that assists in implementing change, and the institutional initiatives which should equip teachers to take the role of agents of curricular change.

The largest section in the document was devoted to methodology. It began by stating that the research was to be in the category of 'post-positivist interpretative inquiry'. Seventeen basic characteristics were attributed to this category. It was argued that the 'human instrument is able to respond to the complexity of human phenomena in ways that are not possible with any other type of data-gathering instrument'. The research would therefore investigate 'teachers' response to the proposed policies of change in their schools'. As a consequence, the inquiry would 'bind' inquirer and respondents together, the latter being thought of as co-researchers.

The group which attended this candidate's presentation included a full professor and one associate professor, some senior staff and several PhD students. This time there was no feeling that there was a schism between ego and the surrounding world in the proposal. However it was thought that the proposal spread too wide a net. The intentions (a)-(c) included a number of issues each meriting a research effort of doctoral dimensions. Now here one might well wonder whether the candidate's supervisors should not have exercised some guiding *fiat* which would have narrowed the focus of the research. It is true to say that judgement on a candidate's work is also a reflection upon those appointed to guide its author. However, this must be qualified in this case. The candidate's effort to mirror that phenomenological totality of Ricoeur's in his research design largely explains, even if it does not excuse, the supervisors' apparent condonation of the 'fault'. Support for this can be drawn from one point which received no discussion, namely that respondents in the investigation would have the status of co-researchers. I will return to this a little later and review it in the light of Thomas' question, 'What is X?'

I come now to the third of my instances. For some time now I have been in dialogue with a colleague who practises as a psychotherapist. In his view Ricoeur's totality is to be understood in a way not explicitly featured in either of the two presentations previously described. His general theoretical stance closely accords with a position described by Nicholas Gier (1981) in his book, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*. It rejects 'the traditional description between an interior mental realm and an external nature' and argues that 'forms of presentation and the world they reveal are inextricably linked'.

The matter we are jointly addressing concerns the merit of a well known counselling theory which places prime importance upon functionality. By this position the role of the counsellor is essentially professional and to be focused upon the end of an increase of problem management efficiency on the part of the client. While recognising that his orientation is eminently reasonable and necessary, my colleague nevertheless has reservations. There is, he feels, a positivist overtone, which results in a 'minimum reliance on constructs that involve assumptions about concealed aspects of human functioning', so that '[f]unctional emphases can cause counsellors to become preoccupied with doing at the expense of being'. In the context of this paper I interpret this comment as indicating that Ricoeur's totality, in terms of this theory, is taken in the sense of what Gier calls 'the traditional distinction'. The consequence is that the ego in Ricoeur's totality is discounted. We should talk of the ego 'in' rather than 'and' the surrounding world. The 'preoccupation with doing' my colleague warns against, but suggests to be a dangerous likelihood if the precepts of the theory are followed then becomes a matter of personal (ego) adjustment within the surrounding social environment. The task of counsellors is to enable their clients successfully to undertake this task of 'problem management'.

What the two of us are engaged in is an attempt to make clear (or clearer) to ourselves just what is lost in this discounting procedure. In doing so, we seek to combine the disciplinary backgrounds of psychology and philosophy. I am particularly engaged with inquiring into what is indicated by my colleague's reference to 'assumptions about concealed aspects of human functioning' and what is to be understood by the phrase 'at the expense of being'. It seems to me that my colleague, by virtue of his critique of functionalism in counselling, is evoking a notion close to what 'Dasein' in Heidegger denotes, namely, to quote Heidegger himself, 'affective relationships with surrounding people and objects'. He also appears to be in accord with a comment by Langan (1959) in *The Meaning of Heidegger* that, by Heidegger's account, 'authenticity requires that we grasp our Being in its outermost possibilities'. Hence his talk of concealed aspects of human functioning, which, in his opinion, the theory he examines largely neglects. Furthermore, it is plausible to suggest that my colleague's reference to 'being' invokes the concept of 'being for itself' that is central to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* denoting, as Blackburn (1994) has it in his *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 'the mode of existence of consciousness, consisting in its own activity and purposive nature'.

Together with much else, we grapple, then, with the combination of Heideggerian and Sartrean theory and such complexities as Heidegger's *Existentiale* and Sartre's account of consciousness. This is to find ourselves seemingly in exactly that constant retreat from the immediate topic that I mentioned early on in this paper. This is not so, however, if my contention about the value of Thomas's analysis of the 'What is X?' question is valid.

Thomas's discussion refers principally to Plato's *Meno*. Let me immediately disabuse anyone of any fear that there will now follow a disquisition on idealism as against realism as against whatever else. You are not to be plunged into a maelstrom of philosophical disquietude. At the start of this dialogue we encounter Meno himself, a somewhat opinionated person about to be humbled by the Platonic Socrates. In the first commentary upon his new translation, Thomas examines the nature of the errors that Meno makes in his early exchanges with Socrates. Thomas selects a remark that Socrates makes in response to Meno's query as to whether virtue is teachable:

> ... if I don't know what a thing is, how could I know what sort of thing it is?

This is to say that one cannot answer whether or not X can be taught, (or whatever), without knowledge of just what comprises X. This is as true of anything dealt with in the two research proposals and my exchanges with my colleague as it is with the virtue of which Meno speaks.

Thomas now supposes X to be comprised of FGHI and that one response made to the question, 'What is X?' is that X is F, while a second asserts that X is M. He describes the first response as unsatisfactory because it is crucially incomplete. It is a 'partial answer' which, at best, can only be thought of as contributing to what is requisite and, at worst, can be radically misleading since the property 'F' might adhere to things other than X. The second response is unsatisfactory by definition. It's false.

Thomas wishes to point out how easy it is to make errors of this kind. They may seem blatantly obvious, but recall my first instance of a research proposal presentation. Could it not be that what there occurred was a misdirection of much the same kind as Thomas's discussion details? It appeared at the start that X in this case was major institutional change and its effect. As the proposal developed, X seemed instead to be the thought processes of people. Perhaps institutional change requires such processes but that is not all that is required. At best, then, we have a partial answer.

Continuing his analysis Thomas briefly transfers his attention to another of the Platonic dialogues, the *Gorgias*, and to one Polus, another foil for Socrates. The question this time is 'What is Rhetoric?'. Polus responds with '... the noblest of the arts'. Now that would do if the question had been, 'What is *your*

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estimation of rhetoric?' It is inappropriate when the question is about what rhetoric actually is.

Recall now the second research proposal presentation which I described and the stated intention to regard respondents in the research as co-researchers. Given that these respondents are, to employ the terminology in the proposal, 'human instruments' yielding data, this is to place them in somewhat the same case as Polus. Having had his opinion of curricular change ascertained, is the respondent, now as co-researcher, to assess his own opinion? If one is not very careful there can be a steady retreat into what is presaged by talk of *perceptions of X* and succeeded, on the one hand, by declarations that, 'these findings are in no way exhaustive and cannot be generalised', and, on the other hand, by professions such as that this inquiry has contributed to what is known about 'X'. (Precisely this appeared in a recent thesis I read.)

There is a difference between prescribed curriculum changes and how this or that person or group conceives of them. In my view the candidate giving the second presentation understood this and so, in order to preserve the two things in complement, proposed (a)-(c) adjudged by the group to overextend the scope of the research. But can it not be argued that to constrict the scope thus would be to fail to meet a requirement set out by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) in their book on qualitative research that researchers must 'critically see through their subjectivity'?

Finally, I come back to my interchange with my colleague on counselling theory. Thomas contends that:

> ... attempts to answer ... 'What is the nature of X?' without (reference) to the relationships in which X stands are empty [while] preoccupation with relationships without insight into X's nature are blind.

This precisely states the problem my colleague sees in the counselling theory at issue. If we take Heidegger's term 'standing in' to mean 'freely relating himself to things', and his term 'Dasein' to have the meaning mentioned earlier, my colleague implies that the counselling theory we examine proposes an inauthentic mode of relating to circumstances, one which, in Langan's words, 'takes its stamp from the concern of the crowd'. Hence he becomes enmeshed in that which allows of what Langan reports Heidegger as warning against, namely the condition which:

> ... finds Dasein so concerned with the necessities of daily life ... so involved in the necessary search for bread and in concern for

> what 'they' say that he ignores above all the reality of his own existence.

There is then no free relating to things. A theory of counselling encouraging this must surely be at fault, my colleague argues. The question becomes 'Where is X?' rather than 'What'. However, my query remains. If central reliance is placed upon 'being for itself', how is it to be understood? The 'What is X?' challenge is reinstated together with the need to avoid the traps revealed by Thomas.

The issues herein raised are drawn from observation of the research thrust at its origination. That is why I suggest they merit inspection.

AFTERTHOUGHT

When the colloquium heard this paper, it received a twofold response.

In the first instance it was pointed out that the difficulties discussed were of a kind to be expected at the outset of a candidature. Working through them was what making a thesis involved.

The second response took the form of a number of testimonies to precisely this by members of the colloquium who were either about to present their theses for examination or had but very recently done so. All these persons adamantly confirmed the value of thinking their way through to sometimes quite unexpected destinations in terms of interpretations and meanings.

In this briefest of responses I immediately acknowledge the cogency of the above points.

I wonder whether they quite hit the mark nevertheless. The argument of the paper hinged upon an intermediate stage in the thesis-making process, that of the presentation of the thesis proposal. This occurred anywhere from a year to two or three after the commencement of candidature. I am not entirely sure that the kind of confusions I described in the paper should have been present at such a stage. Nor am I sure that their presence at this point *constitutes a benefit to the candidate's efforts to explore an issue.*

Secondly, it is one thing to testify to the value of confusions and uncertainties overcome when at the successful conclusion of the enterprise, but another thing to be overborne by them with that end but a distant and doubtful prospect, however much hoped for. Do the problems I tried to outline in my paper deter more worthy candidates than we notice in an enlarged and still enlarging tertiary system?

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Chapter 17

At sea ... beginning to do qualitative research... from and for whom does knowing and the known emanate?

Teresa Arnold

Navigating

There I was, fresh from the country on a fresh spring day. Feeling fresh, a beginner in qualitative research in adult education. Finally I had successfully navigated the inner suburbs of Melbourne. Just like the buildings I had passed by, almost all the people at the colloquium were strangers too. Also like the buildings, some were older and grey, even towering ... and cold.

Little did I realise then that navigating the unfamiliar was to continue for months. What are all these research methodologies, what do they mean, how do they influence what becomes knowable and known? Do some methods better suit some people, both the people participating in the research and the person(s) doing the research?

Little did I realise either that people, including myself, were going to be the source of so much unfamiliarity. Will there be people who will be happy to talk about themselves in detail? Can a person like me really do this sort of thi[illegible]hen I know several years ago I would have said it was an unlikelihood for anyone, such a way of finding out did not really exist and so was not possible. This is not what research is - after all I should know, I started out my employment career as a scientific researcher. Now I wonder how much of the research I am now planning to do is about me and my journey and how much is about the people with whom I will be doing the research and their journey.

Waves at the beach

I have seldom felt quite so ... is it unsure, perhaps uncomfortable, as I do now? I wonder now what this says about me and myself, that I feel like this since that fresh spring day. The feeling continues, especially now as I write. There are days when my uncertainty subsides. I find what, to me, is a meaning, for something that was curious. I am able to connect my own experiences to something I have heard or read. My experience brings to life a relatively limited understanding gained through listening and reading. This is what I call knowing experientially as opposed to knowing intellectually. Now I can recall and give more meaning to the event, the people, the emotions, the feelings, messages from my senses, rather than juggling only worded abstractions in my head. Uncertainty surrounding the curiosity dissipates. Like a spent wave receding at the sea's edge, it moves back over the sand into deeper water, to be incorporated back into the oceans or maybe the next incoming wave. But uncertainty doesn't arrive as predictably, like waves arriving at the beach; I can't find a metaphor for uncertainty arriving yet. I feel uncertainty leaves like a spent wave at the beach; the energy within a wave, to find out, understand and make meaning, is gone, but it will build up again at some stage.

I have been looking at these waves now for a couple of weeks and maybe uncertainty does arrive like a wave. Why this turnaround? Maybe I have not been noticing the weather changes or the moon, and how these affect the waves. I had better try and take these 'on board'.

Home comforts

A meaning ... what do I mean, 'a' meaning? Well this meaning of mine and receding uncertainty does not lead to certainty. There is something odd about certainty. As I get older, it seems that certainty is not very certain at all. It seems that certainty has many ways of being. How will I cope with suspending judgment and dwelling with the lived experience of other people, their home comforts, which are called for in phenomenology? How do I reconcile my ways of knowing, my home comforts, with the ways of knowing which people have suggested and literature recommends for finding out what I want to find out in my research, and with which I find myself agreeing? This seems to be the part of the research which is as much about me as the people and the research I would like to do. Is this the self-interest which my beginner's guide to philosophy talks about in a chapter on ego and altruism? Do I now know from my own lived experience what the book means by egoism and altruism?

Is this self-interest the challenge which drives me from within, which I hope will sustain me through uncertainty, uncomfortableness and certainty, to live at ease with uncertainty again and again? Will all this be a source of personal growth for which I am looking? Am I being driven from within or am I being drawn?

Landfall, land forms or bounded countries

The more I think about doing qualitative research the more questions I seem to have. I wonder how I will possibly make a start if the number of questions I have is even vaguely linked to a sense of control that might be needed to make a start. Something is telling me, though, that I should make a start, just as Christopher Columbus left without a map and discovered the Americas. This is novel for me, someone who is generally well organised and gives the onlooker the impression of being in some sort of control.

What I have discovered about qualitative research already is that there seem to be so many variations on the theme. Common ground between different parts seems to come and go -mainly go, though, depending on to whom I am talking. Like the old grey buildings which have stood a test of time, the specialist devoutly defends his territory (so far for me it has been 'his'), citing claims to this or that aspect which is not present in another territory. I wonder, can't it be 'and and both', not only 'either or'? Variations on the theme probably goes with the territory of qualitative research, but why do boundaries keep appearing ...? I can accept buildings having clear(er) boundaries, but I am not (yet ... should I ever be?) easy with them in qualitative research. Or could it be a gender bias like a male animal marking its territory ... or do women do it too? I would rather think of this territory as land: boundaries, like buildings, are simply man-made things on a map. It seems though this territory has clearly defined boundaries clearly marking the points at which landforms are deemed to have changed. This is not to say that within variations, or landforms, there are not specific features only found within them, but landforms more usually give way with a blend from one to the next.

Mapping

I have found the language of qualitative research esoteric. I wish there were a book, like my beginner's philosophy book, which was comprehensive, with succinct self contained topics and free of technical jargon. There seems to be a real niche for a book like this on qualitative research, a good basic map. That is not to forget that it is only a map - the map is not the territory - but it would be a great start. I wish there were someone who could talk about, describe and explain the land, its landforms and landscapes. The journey with its lived experience might be (even) more enjoyable.

Washed up

Can I hear some one saying the way you see the problems is the problem? I can see a later writing on doing qualitative research ... washed up ... I wonder dead or alive? ... never again or ready for more.

Chapter 18

Reflections on the role of an evaluator

Roger Harris

Introduction

There is an increasing need for evaluative studies in vocational education and training for both program improvement and accountability. The so-called national training reform agenda has been unfolding with too little research and evaluation to inform us of its consequences.

A while ago I was asked to be the evaluator of a (former) Department of Employment, Education and Training-funded national project to equip TAFE teachers and industry trainers to implement competency-based training and assessment. I don't intend in this paper to present detailed results of that evaluation nor to summarise lessons learnt from that national project as a form of professional development (see Harris 1993). Nor is it my purpose here to debate the merits or otherwise of competency-based training (CBT); there is already much polarised opinion - most often generating more heat than light - on that issue around the country in busy workplaces, hallowed halls of government agencies and fretting educational staffrooms (see Harris 1995, Harris *et al.* 1995). Instead, my sole purpose here is to reflect on my role as evaluator.

How was I to do justice to this quite large, complex and well funded national project?

The project in brief

The aim of the project was to catalyse the process of CBT implementation by providing training in the delivery and assessment of CBT.

The (then) **TAFE National Centre for Research and Development** (now, NCVER) in Adelaide was seen as the research and development body best

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placed to *develop* resources and a training program for accomplishing this objective. On the other hand, the **National Centre for Competency-Based Training** (NCCBT) in Melbourne was seen as the training body best placed to *deliver* the CBT program.

The project unfolded in two main, overlapping phases. The **development phase** by one Centre stretched over eight months, during which a CBT conference and three development workshops were held and a series of six modules and their resources were designed and produced. This was followed by revisions until the final package was published. The **delivery phase** by the other Centre followed over six months, during which 11 five-day workshops were conducted across six States/Territories for a total of 311 participants. Following each workshop, participants were to develop an action contract, either as individuals or in teams, for undertaking some CBT task back in the workplace, submit the contract to the NCCBT, then implement it within three months and have someone assess and confirm its completion.

The evaluation process

So what role was I to play in this project? How was I to evaluate all of this?

My role

The central issue for me as the evaluator was the degree of involvement versus the degree of detachment. At times, the role involved being a participant observer as fully as resources, including time, would allow in order to gather the required information. At other times, however, there was the need to maintain a level of detachment/independence in order to fulfil the role of observer and evaluator; for example, I believed it important not to become engaged in developing CBT resources, delivering a paper or chairing at the Conference, facilitating in the workshops or officiating in any of the meetings related to the project. It was a fine balance; the demarcation line was not often very clear. The prime function throughout, however, was to observe, listen, question and probe.

To accomplish this, I required access to all individuals involved with the project, as well as to all related files, meetings, the conference and workshops.

I developed a detailed evaluation proposal at the start of the project and this was accepted by project personnel and the Project Steering Committee. The evaluation design needed to be viewed by both evaluator and other project personnel as *a process* not a blueprint, a plan that could be negotiated, reviewed and modified at any time in order to remain responsive to needs. At all times, continuing collaboration between evaluator and other project personnel was necessary.

My role was to involve the collection of data, the information mainly being in the form of observation notes, interview notes, review comments and questionnaire data. Subsequently, the information was to be analysed and interpreted in the light of project component objectives, assessments of participant needs, the evaluator's professional judgement, and (where appropriate) the professional judgement of others external to the project.

Evaluation models used

The first big decision was to settle upon an appropriate evaluation model. The model of evaluation selected for the overall project was the CIPP Model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam (1983, 1985). CIPP is an acronym for:

Context : assessing needs; the objectives of the project

Input: identifying and evaluating competing plans; the design of the project

Process : evaluating and guiding the implementation of plans; the operation of the project

Product : evaluating outcomes; the extent of attainment of the project objectives

This model is based on the notion that the most important purpose of evaluation is **not to prove but to improve**. The CIPP model regards evaluation as a tool to assist projects and programs to work better for the intended audience, and is designed to promote growth and encourage the leadership of projects and programs to obtain and use feedback to meet needs more effectively with available resources.

Given the nature of this joint project, I chose this particular model as the most appropriate for the following reasons :

- It is able to exercise both a formative and a summative role (whereas many other models are concerned only, or primarily, with summative evaluation). This model may be used both to guide decision-making as well as supply information for accountability. Both uses were important for this project.

- It is comprehensive in terms of allowing the exploration of several different components of the project, that is, it is holistic.

- It does not subscribe to the 'witch hunt paradigm' or exist only as a tool for accountability.

- It is sensitive to feedback.

- It provides for entry of the evaluator either before or during the project, rather than on completion to perform a *post-mortem*.

- It is oriented towards the needs of those planning and administering the project.

- It is a model originally conceptualised as a tool for evaluating funded projects (like this one) developed in response to the need in the late 1960s in the USA for new and better strategies for evaluation.

In evaluating the workshop program, the model of Donald Kirkpatrick (1975) was employed as a guide because of its comprehensiveness. Kirkpatrick refers to four levels of program evaluation:

1) reactions	*What did participants think of it?*
2) learning	*What learning took place?*
3) job behaviour	*Has the program led to any change in the workplace?*
4) results	*Have there been any results in the organisation that can be attributed to the program?*

His main point is that an effective evaluation should try to address as many of these as possible. He particularly draws attention to the fact that most evaluations cover only the first of these levels, sometimes the second, and rarely the other two levels. In this project, the first three levels were attempted. Given the requirement to complete the evaluation soon after the eleventh workshop, sufficient time was unavailable for gauging effects on participants' organisations.

Evaluation methods

I utilised several evaluation methods through the overall project in an attempt to obtain as balanced and varied a picture as possible:

- content analysis of relevant documents;
- interviews with key personnel, both inside and outside the project;
- participant observation in most of the formal processes of the project;
- various questionnaires to participants; and
- reflection sheets to project coordinators, developers and facilitators.

When evaluating the workshops, the first level of evaluation - **participant reaction** - was undertaken by means of feedback questionnaires after every module and at the end of each workshop. Further first level evaluation was conducted on a small sample three months later. The workshop coordinator recorded his impressions in writing after every workshop, and facilitators wrote reflective comments on their experiences after the whole program of 11 workshops had been completed. As evaluator, I audited two of the workshops, observing every session, recording processes and impressions, and talking informally with both participants and facilitators throughout both weeks.

The second level of evaluation - **amount of learning** - was measured using self-reported estimates of ability on the program's learning outcomes before and after the workshops, and for the smaller sample, three months later. I did not believe that actually testing their knowledge and skills before and after was either appropriate for this adult group or feasible, given the time available. Therefore I relied on their judgements of the extent to which they had learnt. This approach is a form of humanistic sociology, where a system (in this case, the CBT program) is seen *through the eyes of the players within that system* - that is, the people who give that system meaning and value by their experience of it. From this perspective, their self-report is an act of self-definition and has its own validity.

The third level - **workplace change** - was gauged from examination of the number and nature of completed action contracts and accompanying letters of confirmation from workplace 'assessors', as well as from a sample of participants who were either questionnaired or telephoned three months after their workshops.

I was particularly keen to meld quantitative and qualitative information as much as possible. The choice of research method in any project is influenced by the assumptions the researcher holds about the social world and its inhabitants, as well as by the nature of the study required. I believe that the richest picture comes from a combination of both types of information, and fully agree with Burns (1994, p.241) when he writes:

> Quantitative and qualitative methods may appear to be opposites derived from different philosophies, yet both are legitimate tools of research and can supplement each other, providing alternative insights into human behaviour. One method is neither better nor poorer than the other.

The quantitative data, providing the measures, came from the various questionnaires. The qualitative data, capturing the richness of the detail and interpretation through the human voices, came from the interviews, the open-ended comments made by workshop participants in the questionnaires, and the reflections from the project coordinators, developers and deliverers as well as various State and Territory representatives.

One advantage of including comments from 'insiders' was to highlight the difference between the evaluator's interpretation of events and that of others actually engaged. Since the authentic experience is impossible for outsiders, the inclusion of insider comments was therefore thought to be an important check on my interpretations. Such reporting of differences is not often highlighted in reports of observational studies (Shipman *et al.* 1974, pp. viii-ix).

Another advantage is to demonstrate that the views of insiders may also differ *among themselves*. Documents issued under the auspices of the project may have given a consistent picture; however, behind the scenes, debates raged that made my task fascinating (and at times complex and tricky):

> Everyone sees a different moving picture of an event in which all are involved. There are differences in interpretation and disagreement about what actually happened, but these are not necessarily right or wrong. The accounts differ because we all played a different part in the same ball game. (Shipman et al. 1974, p. x)

Formative evaluation

During the project, there was a considerable amount of verbal and written feedback to the key players as a result of my role as a participant observer. In this role, I attended the following five main types of activities:

- various project management meetings in Adelaide and Melbourne;
- most Steering Committee meetings in Melbourne;
- the three-day CBT conference in Melbourne at which many pilot projects to support CBT implementation were reported;
- three developers' workshops in Melbourne during which the various module teams debated the workshop format and the integration of their resources; and
- two of the 11 delivery workshops, providing feedback not only verbally during each of those weeks but also immediately afterwards in writing to each of the presenters.

My participation in, and feedback on, all of these activities were in line with the Stufflebeam model of offering formative guidance to the decision-making processes.

Reporting the evidence

How was I to organise and report the evaluation data? The framework I decided on comprised seven sections.

Two sections analysed what happened during the respective phases of development and delivery. Activities were recorded, and my observations and judgements presented and compared with the perspectives of both project teams and various State/Territory representatives as they all reflected back on the project after it had been completed. These sections served to provide readers with an account of the project's activities and the (often differing) interpretations of these through the frames of reference of the various key players.

Three further sections then presented and discussed the workshop participants' perspectives within the framework of Kirkpatrick's model, namely,

- What did the participants think of the workshops?

- What learning took place?
- Did the program lead to workplace changes?

Finally, two sections summarised the overall project. The first of these synthesised all the evidence obtained and reached conclusions on the extent to which the intentions and outcomes of the project had been attained. The second, making use of insights gained during the evaluation process, reflected upon the lessons learned from the project.

What were the main conclusions?

When the analysis of the extent to which intentions and objectives were met in this project was viewed against the backdrop drawn in the two 'what happened' sections, it was evident that many of the eventual shortfalls had in fact been recognised early in the project. Many concerns and contentious issues raised in the various meetings and subsequently documented ultimately did become problematic. The reasons why potential problems were not recognised at the time were not always clear: some problems may not have been anticipated; others may have been ignored.

The result was a project that in my judgement showed significant promise and potential, that was adequately funded to meet a growing need for staff development in the implementation of CBT, and that involved a considerable number of well intentioned and cooperative players who had the project at heart, but a project nevertheless that was variable in its achievement of its intentions and objectives, even on the admission of its own project teams and participants.

Its **key strengths** were that it:

- furnished useful packages that could be used in various. ways around Australia by both participants and non-participants to assist the implementation of CBT;
- provided exposure to CBT concepts and practices to 311 training personnel in six States/Territories;
- promoted significant shifts, according to participant self-reports, towards more positive attitudes towards CBT;

- led to significant increases, using self-estimates as the measure, in levels of ability to perform CBT tasks;
- produced some cascade effect in workplaces in the form of presentations on CBT by workshop participants to colleagues, and by the development and delivery teams themselves to other groups;
- initiated and fostered a working relationship between two National Centres; and
- incorporated into its design almost from the beginning an evaluative component.

Its **main weaknesses** were that it:

- struggled as a result of the dichotomy of having one Centre as the designer and developer and the other Centre as the reproducer and deliverer;
- was aimed at a particular target audience of TAFE and industry practitioners in teams, which did not eventuate;
- was perceived to be too geared towards TAFE, did not involve industry to the extent originally envisaged, and did not promote in any significant manner the desired close working relationship between industry and TAFE;
- stimulated (within the timeframe of the project) relatively little real change in the workplaces of participants beyond orientation presentations to colleagues;
- relied almost exclusively on a 'train the trainer' rather than an 'action learning' model of training that was predominantly delivered via formal presentations by six different presenters, some of whom had relatively little experience with this formal presentation mode of delivery of workshops at a national level and across a diversity of work areas.
- experienced problems of 'ownership'; for example, the presenters were all male; they came and went during each workshop without having the opportunity to build rapport with participants, respond to issues relating to their session later in the workshop, or provide assistance with action contract development; they were all from

> one State and most of their experience had been with one college which had a partiality for a particular approach to CBT (namely, self-paced learning) that was not always shared by others; and the presenters felt alienated from the development of the packages, and developers felt alienated from the process of delivery and from the ways in which their developed materials were being used.

The foregoing conclusions represented my considered estimate and were based on the extensive analysis given in the final report. This perspective did not necessarily always accord with the various points of view held by the Steering Committee members, the project teams of the two Centres, the State/Territory authorities or even of the participants themselves. The presentation of an accurately detailed and objective evaluation is, after all, the role of an outside evaluator.

What did I learn most about evaluation from this experience?

I would highlight two points. First, I had reinforced for me how important - in fact, essential - it is to incorporate a mix of evaluation methods into one's evaluation design. A certain level of healthy scepticism should attach to the usefulness of evaluation questionnaires. In this project, questionnaires furnished a considerable amount of very interesting and enlightening formative data on the program. Yet, as always with research methods, there is the need for triangulation - in this case, the use of observations and interviews - to corroborate evidence obtained from any one source. For example, these other methods led me to suspect that many questionnaire respondents were 'going easy' on the project teams - particularly the presenters who were the more visible - because they were TAFE colleagues.

Second, the intrigue of different perceptions fascinated me. It was particularly valuable to obtain the views of 'insiders', to pinpoint as often as possible the differences in perspectives between them and the evaluator, as well as the differences between the players themselves. In this respect, both project managers were asked how they felt at the conclusion of the project.

The NCVER project manager:

> Relieved. Generally happy with the outcomes of the development/maintenance process. Sad, because I feel the development/delivery process as designed didn't work as well as everyone had hoped or expected - nor as well as it could

> have. A variety of reasons both within and/or outside the project contributed to this.

The NCCBT project manager:

> A little disappointed that these workshops are not going to continue to be supported by the Commonwealth as there is a desperate need/demand for this program ... There was universal agreement among participants that this program was wonderfully successful ... The overall quality of the program was outstanding ... There is no similar program available in Australia.

Their responses revealed **a mixture of emotions** that, in a very real sense, encapsulated the ups and downs, and at the same time reflected the differences in outlook, that characterised this project throughout. I had to learn to deal with them. The 'politics' are, I recognised from this project, a very real factor in any evaluation.

Conclusion: the importance of evaluation

In summary, the idea of an evaluation built into the contract was innovative and proved helpful for the organisations conducting the project as well as for DEET. The project team managers both commented favourably on the process of evaluation in their reflection papers at the end of the project:

> [One of the strengths has been] that it has been formally evaluated. This is a rarity for many projects of similar size/significance (NCVER project manager).
>
> ... what some people might see as an over evaluation ... was in fact almost instant feedback and kept presenters constantly seeking means to improve presentations and giving the program a chance to rectify any problems that the participants (and myself) had discovered ... Thank you ... for your support, at all stages you were positive in your feedback and your helpful advice to the other presenters and especially myself was much appreciated. (NCCBT project manager)

The evaluation provided DEET and the main stakeholders with a detailed description and evaluation from an independent perspective that would be of assistance in further project contracting. It provided feedback at formative stages of the project's unfolding, and it made the project accountable - the two purposes originally established under the Stufflebeam model of evaluation. I firmly believe that more evaluation like this in vocational education and training would help to improve both the quality of its provision and its status as a legitimate and recognised field for research.

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Chapter 19

Course design as action research

Martin Mulligan

Introduction

The undergraduate program in the School of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury is in its fourth year. The school has a much older postgraduate program (our graduate diploma can trace its lineage back 21 years to its genesis in rural extension). But the undergraduate course is still in its infancy. It had a difficult birth and the child could not be described as being robust and indestructible. But it is learning how to walk.

Of course, it is quite exciting to design a new course. In our case, ideas about teaching and learning were borrowed from our postgraduate programs and other elements of course design were taken from the undergraduate program in Systems Agriculture at our university (which works within an experiential learning paradigm). But different parts of the course were designed by different people and, inevitably, it had a rather eclectic feel to it. During the first three years many changes were made within different parts of the course, but during the fourth year a more radical rethink took place.

In a school where there has always been a big emphasis on processes of learning (more than on the content of what is taught), teaching and learning experiences change with every new group that joins the course. But such a process-oriented approach can also create considerable confusion about overall course aims and can undercut the cumulative process of building courses that have a working (not stifling) structure to them. Staff get the feeling that they are constantly reinventing the wheel.

It is fair to say that our recent rethink about our courses was largely triggered by a feeling among many staff members that our workloads have been getting to be unsustainable (made worse by the fact that we are expected to know too much about too many things). But, when we told undergraduate students that we saw a need to make the course design clearer and more coherent, we got an enthusiastic response. It reminded us that we need to work with **both** content and learning processes to develop the sense of what a course in Social Ecology is really all about. As mentioned already, our undergraduate course originally drew from teaching practices we had used in postgraduate programs. Once we started to think about how we might redesign the undergraduate course, the ideas then flowed back into our post-graduate programs (reverse osmosis) and we saw an opportunity to create a closer articulation between all our courses.

I cannot say that the process we entered around redesigning our courses was designed as a piece of action research. But I believe that is what it became. This reminds me that action research helps to dissolve old distinctions between research and project development and helps embed research in some of our day-to-day practices. The following interpretation of our process shows that it followed a spiral process similar to the model of action research proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

Description of the process

The redesigning process began at an April 1995 staff retreat (renamed 'advance' by some), called to address feelings of frustration among the staff. At this meeting one staff member, David Russell, put forward the suggestion that we might all feel more comfortable if we could 'constellate' around themes in which we felt we had something to offer. In this way we could develop more teamwork around developing our course content and teaching ideas, while at the same time projecting a clearer picture of what our courses are about. After long discussion this idea was embraced and we entered the first point of the action-research spiral.

The next step arose out of a discussion between myself and colleague Hilary Armstrong in which we felt we could take the initiative in naming the themes around which staff might want to constellate. We felt the existing design of the undergraduate course (and the feedback we had received from students doing the course) could be matched up with the backgrounds and known interests of staff members to create theme areas that would build on past work and simultaneously capture our passions. On this basis we wrote a discussion paper, circulated to all staff members, which nominated five theme areas and explored the implications of this for redesigning our undergraduate, Graduate Diploma, and coursework Masters courses. This could be seen as a stage of reflection on earlier experience leading to a new plan of action.

The discussion paper was well received and formed the basis of a number of lengthy discussions at staff meetings. The five theme areas nominated by Hilary and myself were: 1) Science, technology and the environment; 2) Society, culture and ecological worldviews; 3) Community and organisation studies; 4) Learning; and 5) Research methodologies. After the first round of discussion it was decided to combine Learning and Research into one theme and all staff nominated their first and second preferences for team membership. It was felt that the new 'theme teams' could carry a lot of responsibility for course development, teaching and assessment but, for them to take up such responsibilities, we would need to shift the focus from existing course teams to the new theme teams. An issue arose as to whether the new theme teams should be led by senior academics, but this was resolved in favour of giving leadership to those who were most enthusiastic to make the new teams work. While a number of staff members had the feeling that we might be just adding another round of meetings to our agendas, a decision was taken to form the theme teams immediately and let them develop their own identity and role further. At this stage we moved from planning into action.

The three theme teams that were focused on content settled down quite quickly, but the Learning and Research area proved to be more difficult. There seemed to be something quite different about this theme, although a number of people stressed that we needed to teach more content in terms of theories about both learning and research. Eventually, it was decided that, with all members of staff involved in this theme in some capacity, this team would be different to the others in that we would all be members. It was agreed that fortnightly meetings would alternate between the Learning and Research theme involving everyone and the other separate theme teams. But while the other three teams moved on to considering what they could offer in each of our courses, the Learning and Research team struggled to develop an agenda and floundered for want of leadership. It was as if the all-inclusive nature of this team undermined its own identity and dissolved the responsibility.

Once most staff members were convinced that the new theme teams could play a useful role, it was decided that we experiment with the theme areas in designing the July residential for our Graduate Diploma and coursework Masters students. The functional theme teams were asked to prepare separate workshops for the residential week and the whole idea of redesigning the course around such themes was to be discussed with members of both courses. This 'pilot' project was deemed to be a success in that the separate workshops were generally well received and staff felt that their contribution to the week had been more clearly defined. Most feedback from course participants was also favourable, although it was harder to discuss what it would mean for the Masters course because it is run in conjunction with the School of Agriculture and Rural Development. The general consensus among those staff members involved with the residential was that the pilot had given us enough encouragement to take the redesigning process further.

By this time some work had been done on identifying necessary changes to the undergraduate course for 1996. Two new subjects were created in order to give all theme teams an opportunity to work with the students in both the first and second years, and the idea that students could choose a major in third year from among the themes was embraced. As a further pilot project it was agreed that some of the subjects offered in the second semester of 1995 could be offered by the new theme teams in an experimental way.

The next initiative came from the Graduate Diploma course team which developed a model of how this course might be redesigned to work around the themes and indicated what it thought the responsibilities of the theme teams would be. This model included a proposal to more closely articulate the Graduate Diploma in Social Ecology and the Masters programs so that students completing the former could move into the second year of the Masters (part-time) and finish with both degrees. However, those involved with the Masters had to think through the implications of these changes for the relationship with the other school involved in the course. A stage of further planning and reflection was needed.

By September it was felt that the new theme teams had become a reality and that the pilots had offered encouragement, but it was felt that we needed to come together as a full staff group to develop clearer models for how the redesigned courses would look and what would be the responsibility of each theme team. To facilitate this process a two-day retreat was planned for the semester break in early October. On the first day of this retreat we worked through the new models for each course and examined the relationship between the Graduate Diploma and the Masters. Each theme team presented its ideas on what it would be offering in the undergraduate course, in particular. On the second day we decided to focus on the Learning and Research theme and broke into sub-groups around learning and research. This suggested that this theme might involve separate sub-groups on learning and research with all-in planning meetings facilitated by a senior staff member. We left the retreat with the feeling that we had achieved consensus about the course models we would use in 1996, noting that a faculty review in that year would give us a further opportunity to reflect on the experience and make some further changes.

By this time the theme teams had all reconsidered their names and we were left with: 1) Science, Environment and Society; 2) Archetypes, Culture and Futures; 3) Community and Organisation Studies; and 4) Learning and Research. We felt we had completed at least one action-research cycle and were prepared to move to the next plane of the spiral by trying out the models agreed at the October retreat.

Cultural change

In view of the fact that a number of staff members are involved in teaching, research and consultancy in the area of organisational change, we were well aware that shifting the culture of the school would not be easy. We were aware, for example, that it would take conscious work by people in new teams to develop some momentum for a new culture (see Dalmau and Dick 1990). And we were aware that the change process would need to proceed fast enough to avoid becoming stalled while at the same time giving all staff members the opportunity to feel involved (see Kanter et al 1992). As we discussed the concept of the learning organisation in some of our courses, we felt we should be 'walking our talk' by using this concept in our rethinking about the school and its offerings (see Senge 1992).

It also occurred to us that we had the opportunity to construct a new matrix management model for the school, in which the theme teams and course teams would intersect, creating new communication flows (see Morgan 1989, pp.64-67). It was decided that a new management team should be constructed with representatives from both the theme teams and program coordinators. We knew that cultural change required leadership (Senge 1990) but we wanted the whole process to remain transparent to both staff and students in the school.

In making 'radical' change we also wanted to ensure that we didn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Anxieties among staff about workloads had led to a strong critique of our old culture but what was being suggested as radical change was, in some cases, a return to very traditional methods of teaching. For example, it was suggested early on that we might abandon the general 'learning facilitation' groups in favour of subject-oriented tutorial groups, but student feedback indicated strong opposition to this and so we decided to keep facilitation groups (albeit with more content for discussion, perhaps).

While some of the more liberal notions of what has previously been called 'radical' adult education (Mezirow 1995) have been critiqued by more post-modern approaches (Hart 1995), some of the ideas around experiential and emancipatory learning have proven superior to the 'consumer' learning of the mainstream education sector.

Conclusion

The setting up of new theme teams in the School of Social Ecology has made most staff members feel more comfortable about their own offerings and the offerings of the school as a whole. The changes have also received a generally favourable reaction from participants in a number of our courses. So the process begun in April seems to have addressed some of the frustrations being felt within the school. But, of course, there are always new frustrations and more work to be done. For example, we struggle to attract school leavers into our undergraduate course and need to consider the way in which the course is promoted. A number of staff have suggested that the themes have taken us some distance but we still need to work on the coherent identity of the school emerging out of these component themes.

This article, which will be distributed to all staff members, may contribute to a further round of reflection on our strategic planning and help identify our process as an action-research spiral. But it is impossible to avoid the feeling that we are constantly being buffeted by 'external' forces -- funding formulas, competition, increasing workloads on all academics, etc.

In seeking greater clarity about the nature of our courses, are we responding to our own internal needs or to a trend towards the 'commodification' of education? Is there a contradiction between what we, as staff, want to offer and the 'demand' for courses in the 'market'? Will we ever feel comfortable with what we have to offer or are we engaged in a constant process of change?

These are just some of the questions that prevent us from feeling smug about the changes introduced in 1995 but, on the other hand, we can feel confident that we have taken more control of the change process and introduced a model of action research into the process of course design.

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Chapter 20

Autobiography, experiential learning and discourse in context: A thesis in evolution

Peter Waterhouse

Introduction: The K-Tel package

In seeking to explain this study, I am reminded of those K-Tel advertisements we see on television. Loud and fast paced they espouse the virtues of wonder gadgets for the kitchen with rhetoric which keeps unfolding the endless benefits for the home cook.

For this thesis the over-the-top monologue might run something like the following:

> Have a look at this and ring now! We have only limited stocks! This compact adult education study throws brilliant light on the nature of the research process. Through it you'll see the relationship between the research and the researcher. You'll see how the study was shaped by the researcher as the research instrument. No need to wonder ever again about the relationship between the process and the person; the values and ideology are included up front for no extra price.
>
> But that's not all! For the same price this study explores the different 'persons' which constitute the 'one' who is the researcher - you get the personal and the professional, the private and the public, the teacher and the learner. Through personal and professional writings, through poetry and prose you'll see the way the interrelated identities shape one another and contribute to the whole. You'll see inside the researcher's personal diary as well as letters and unpublished drafts for professional journals and project reports. It's sensational educational value, but wait, there's more!

> This research is about adult learning. It explores how learning happens. It exposes and analyses learning experiences to see what makes them so. In particular it looks at literacy learning and documents connections between teaching, learning and life experiences. It 'lifts the lid' on adult learning and literacy in different contexts.
>
> But that's not all. The study also connects with contemporary discourse theory and post-modern interpretations of the world. It shows how the socio-cultural, historical and political context not only shapes the researcher but the research itself. Here you can see the interface between the socio-political and the personal. If you've ever wondered about whether we make the world or the world makes us this study is a must for your bookshelf. All for the one low price. It's incredible!
>
> But wait, there's even more! This study goes further. You'll see how professional engagements of various sorts - including several recent research projects - have shaped and re-shaped this researcher-practitioner's understandings of adult learning and literacy education. Thus it also throws light on professional practice and the practice of professional development. Where have you ever seen a better deal?
>
> There's so much here you won't believe the price. All of this: exploring the research process, documenting personal and professional identities, uncovering the construction of understandings, exposing personal learning in context, de-centring to view learning as social and historical construction, exposing multiple constructions and interpretations, reflecting on implications for professional practice. It's all here in this extraordinary study for just 90,000 words. Send no money, but ring now, this offer can't last!

To be sure, it is an ambitious thesis, in danger of trying to do too much. The study is about adult learning and about the practice of adult literacy - but it is about my learning rather than that of the 'subjects' I encountered along the way. It is about the nature of experiential learning and what it means to learn from experience. It is also about the experience of being an adult educator and literacy practitioner in Australia during the 1980s and into the 1990s - a time of significant change and development in this field.

Moral passages: Public passages

In some respects it is about what Addelson (1994) calls 'moral passages'. Like Addelson, Law (1994), Collins (1991), Newman (1994), Schon (1987) and others, I am interested in the moral and ethical dimensions to professional practice and experiential learning. Our values, beliefs and feelings play a significant part in shaping our engagement with the world - including our professional practice and what we learn from this practice.

Addelson talks of two different sorts of moral passages.

> One sort of moral passage ... has to do with making moral problems public ... In interactionist sociology these have been called social problems or public problems. The more or less local passages of making moral problems public are both the mirrors and the engines of change and stability in the moral passages of the nation, and they are also loci of public conflict. Insiders and outsiders come to be labelled in these passages. 'Our' values and what is normal are designated. Authorities are created and legitimated. These passages come to have institutional and systemic importance. (Addelson 1994, p.24)

The story of adult literacy education in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s is the story of such a moral passage. In 1987 the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs published a report which it had commissioned on adult literacy developments in Australia. The report was titled *Opportunity to Do Brilliantly: TAFE and the Challenge of Adult Literacy in Australia* (Grant 1987) The Federal Department which commissioned this research has been superseded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training. This change of name (and priorities) is indicative of how the ground has shifted in the intervening years. Nevertheless, Grant's report took its title from an observation made by one of the research informants. Helen Gribble, a pioneer of the adult literacy movement in Australia, and then Adult Literacy Coordinator at the Council of Adult Education, said in an interview with Grant:

> There's an opportunity for TAFE to do brilliantly, I think - to be a brilliant asset in the education community by offering what is desperately needed and there's this whole life skills area of which literacy is a part and a crucial part. But at the moment I think the staff in TAFE colleges are not anywhere near where that direction is going to take. So that as they work through all these issues of participation and equity and so on, the opportunity is wonderful but it could be really blown unless they're very careful at developing staff.' (Gribble, in Grant 1987, p.31)

The guarded optimism of Gribble's comments is all the more interesting in retrospect. The years since *Opportunity* was first published have seen the adult literacy movement burst on to the educational stage. The language of the debate on adult literacy issues has shifted from one based on welfare and social justice considerations to a discourse more oriented towards economics and the purported costs to Australia of inadequate language and literacy levels.

In 1989 we saw the publication of *The Social Costs of Inadequate Literacy* (Hartley 1989) and the much quoted *No Single Measure: A Survey of Australian Adult Literacy* (Wickert 1989). 1990 was declared International Literacy Year (ILY) by the United Nations General Assembly. The Australian Government

> ... allocated $1.5 million of new funding in 1989-90 and again in 1990-91 for its ILY program. In its 1990-91 August Budget, the government allocated a further $750,000 to continue ILY activities until June 1991.' (DEET 1992:39)

Noel Simpson, then Executive Director of the ILY secretariat, commented:

> Literacy was not a major issue in Australia before preparations for International Literacy Year (ILY) began in 1989. Apart from traditional concerns about literacy standards in schools, it excited little interest in public policy debates. Australia even seriously considered whether it was worth participating in ILY. Yet, by 1991, literacy had emerged as a broad social and economic concern. It now figures prominently in discussions about award restructuring, and receives specific attention in labour market programs for unemployed people. It is more widely perceived as an issue of social justice, critical for access to contemporary Australian society. The understanding of the issues surrounding literacy has changed. (DEET 1992, p.v)

During ILY we had the Federal Treasurer proclaiming that adult illiteracy costs Australia $3 billion per year in lost productivity (DEET 1990). Whilst these claims are challenged by some (Luke 1992), there is no longer any question that adult literacy is well and truly on the national stage. Since ILY we have had the circulation of the Federal Government's Discussion (Green) Paper on Australia's Language and Literacy Policy and the subsequent Policy Information (White) Paper.

A plethora of ALBE projects and publications have been funded at state and national levels. Virtually none of this work was happening 10 years ago.

There has been an explosion of interest and activity in the field. Laurie Carmichael has told adult literacy workers 'Your time has come. The door of history has opened for you. ... Award restructure can't happen without you.' Gribble has suggested that the field is in danger of hijack and seduction (Gribble 1990).

It is interesting to note how the images have changed - from an 'opportunity to do brilliantly' to fears of 'hijack and seduction'. The massive explosion of interest in, and demand for, ALBE programs has placed the national and state TAFE systems under tremendous pressure. Alongside Gribble (cited above), Bradshaw *et al.*(1989), Wickert (1991), Bradshaw (1993), Ennis (1992, 1993), McConnell and Treloar (1993), Hodgens (1994), Kalantzis (1993), Dymock (1982, 1993), Seddon (1994a, 1994b), Scheeres *et al.* (1993), McKenna (1994), McCormack (1991) and others have written on the development and institutionalisation of ALBE in Australia. They have highlighted concerns associated with the processes of institutionalisation. Overseas writers such as Kazemak (1995) and Mace (1992) have also been significant contributors. In Australia the processes of institutionalisation have also corresponded historically with the development of the training reform agenda and with moves towards privatisation of the training market. Writers such as Yeatman (1991), Meyer (1991), Moore (1991), Marginson (1992), Ball and Bowe (1992), and Gee (1994) have written on these themes and the broader socio-political contexts in which they have emerged.

Moral passages: Personal passages

Collectively, these and other writers have contributed to the professional discourse pervading the field as these developments have unfolded. They have named, framed and highlighted the issues in various ways. As a practitioner within the field I have struggled to find my own ways of naming what is happening, of framing the issues and highlighting concerns. Reading helps me to see how others are doing these things; writing enables me to engage more directly with and contribute to the discourse. However, 'the discourse' is complex and multilayered; it operates at many levels.

My contributions are often informal and marginal - pieces of flotsam bobbing on the fringes of the debates which flood the field. I have taken to writing and distributing poems and pieces of reflective writing. Their publication (if such a process can be referred to as such) usually commences with circulation to immediate friends and colleagues. Sometimes the pieces find their way further afield through seminars, conferences, teacher education programs and research projects. Sometimes they are published more formally in newsletters or journals.

Such pieces are often dealing in an immediate and personal way with the themes prevailing in the wider professional discourse. The following piece represents one example.

Dear Director, Dean, Manager or Principal,
Re: Employment Opportunities
Might you have a vacancy for a reflective practitioner?
I'm learning to navigate Schon's swamp,
to recognise corporate crocodiles
& avoid administrative quicksand.
I'm becoming a critical thinker,
awakened to the discourses
of power & privilege.

I've mastered my TLAs
CBT, ITB, RPL & the rest.
I'm right into Managing Change.
I'll be clever & creative if I can,
willing to give re-training & multi-skilling a go.

It seems there are two categories under which I might apply,
Casual & Contract.
I have only two questions.

If you said I could be a Casual Employee & I came in casual,
wearing shorts, thongs & T-shirt,
stashed my Esky under the desk,
put my feet up & said,
'*OK dudes - what's on today?* '
You'd say I wasn't professional
& show me how casual
is easily made into casualty.

Yet when I rush between jobs
hot & flustered in city traffic jams:
when my mind is fractured
into half a dozen different desks,
in different places, with different faces,
& what I want is always at the last one:

when I'm forced to make a hostage
of my professionalism
& cram it into a cardboard box
in the boot of my car:
when my spouse spits the dummy
at the endless unpaid hours
of preparation & development
& I am torn - because I respect my students
& I want to do it for them:
when I experience all of this,
it doesn't seem very casual to me.

So I ask, for whom is casual employment casual?

But perhaps you say I can go on Contract.
If so I can offer you professional commitment & competence
integrity & loyalty, dedication to the work.

Yet it seems your contract
leaves little room for strategic planning,
with staff security shrunk to single semesters.
Curriculum Development is reduced to
punching out packages for 'flexible delivery'
by the Unknown Trainers who win the tender
& Professional Development
doesn't rate a mention in your contract,
though I'm sure you'll support me
with smiles & words of encouragement.
I notice your contract falls just short
of my vacation,
but worse, far worse,
it falls well short of my vocation.

I'm ready to work;
prepared to be challenged & stretched -
expanded to meet new horizons
& to continue developing.

And so my second question is,
why would you want to contract
my professionalism & my profession?

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February 1994

Is such an expression a legitimate point of focus for research exploring the story of this 'moral passage'? I believe it is. This study attempts to document this public passage from a particular and individual perspective. For running parallel with the public passage has been another story, one which Addelson calls a personal passage. She notes:

> Personal passages concern the making of self in collective action, and so the making of the social order. ... These passages show the generation of selves and the moral social order to be dynamic, full of conflict and turning points and dangers. Selves cannot be explained by talking of individuals being socialized into an existing cultural or moral system. These living selves generate the system. They give meaning to the relations that constitute the social order. (Addelson 1994:25)

So this is also a study of a personal passage. It is a study of meaning and meaning making at various levels. At one level I am both the instrument and the subject of the study. At another I am merely an individual situated socially, culturally and historically. The wider milieu or prevailing discourse is thus the subject for analysis, with my work a mere speck in the unfolding cosmos. Part of the intention here is to explore the dynamic between these public and private domains. As Goodson and Walker note:

> [We] have come to realize that what we have written is deeply autobiographical. ... This may seem self indulgent, but we have come to realize that with regard to our research, the value of our lives as lived is an integral part of the way we view our work, of the focus of that work, of the methodologies and perspectives chosen and deployed in the research studies reported here. Our focus on the personal nature of action and interaction is chosen not so as to concentrate on the individual act of 'history making' but rather as a grounded point of access into broader social contexts and structures: at root we believe that what is personal is the most meaningful means of access into understandings of these wider domains - a sequence which holds where our concerns are methodological or, so to speak, pedagogical. (Goodson and Walker 1991, pp.2-3)

Methodology: Pluralist and post-positivist

The study seeks to utilise both a macro- or wide-angle lens on the world and more intimate micro-analyses. The method is to construct novelesque biographical accounts of learning experiences and subject these accounts to analysis and re-interpretation. It is expected that multiple texts or readings will be constructed which will allow the experiences to be framed and reframed within contemporary theoretical understandings of adult learning (and literacy).

The central text is built upon stories drawn from my life, learning and professional practice. The stories are supported by primary data including personal and professional writing, published and unpublished pieces, poems, letters to colleagues and friends, audiotapes, transcripts, project reports and so on. All of these can be dated and situated in context. This approach has emerged through a growing appreciation of the value of autobiographical accounts of learning experience and research.

In *On Being Literate* Margaret Meek states:

> As I began to clear a path through the maze of literacy studies I was struck by the apparent indifference to their own literate history on the part of many scholars and researchers, most of whom wrote wisely and well. Unlike poets and novelists who confront their struggles with words as part of their resource material, academics who write about literacy are notoriously reticent about how they learned to read and write. (Meek 1991, p.232)

She urges self-reflection on these issues as 'a good and helpful thing to do' and draws on her own biography to illustrate the process. A little further on she suggests:-

> Come then. What is it to be literate? We have to draw our own maps, trace our own histories, acknowledge our own debts and consider ways not taken. (Meek 1991:234)

In training ethnographic researchers, Kelly-Byrne (1989) also stresses the importance of autobiography. Reason and Marshall (1987), Miller (1993), Willis (1994), Blaxter *et al.* (1994) and Davis (1994) are among a growing school of writers demonstrating the value of autobiographical accounts of experiential learning.

Newman (1990) describes the value of focusing on what she describes as 'critical incidents'. Van Manen (1990) suggests the power of anecdote. This study builds upon both, whilst some sections take a larger unit of analysis which I have called episodes. In some cases these episodes constituted formal research projects which have been documented according to rigorous conventions for academic research. Reports of some of this work have already been written (see for instance Waterhouse 1985; Grant et. al. in press; Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin 1994; Sefton, Waterhouse & Cooney forthcoming)

Other episodes were not framed as formal research activities but they were nevertheless significant learning projects from a personal point of view. Each of these episodes carried its own constraints. Each took place within a particular context. Each had its own methodology. This study builds upon these multiple texts and attempts a hermeneutic and phenomenological analysis of this collective continuum of formal and informal experiential learning.

The method here is informed by phenomenological approaches as described by van Manen (1990). According to this view, writing *is* the method. The very process of drafting, redrafting, exposing, exploring, and clarifying the essential themes of the lived experience constitutes the research method.

> Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered. That is why the meaning of pedagogy can never be grasped in a single definition. Human science meaning can only be communicated textually - by way of organised narrative or prose. And that is why the human science researcher is engaged in the reflective activity of textual labor. To do human science is to be involved in the crafting of a text. (van Manen 1990)

Later he adds:

> Yet for the human sciences, and specifically for hermeneutic phenomenological work, writing is closely fused into the research activity itself... Writing is the method. And to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. (ibid.)

Thus, the study draws upon the 'writing and rewriting' which has characterised my engagement with the field over this period of time.

However, the study is not just biography. It is also 'sociography'. There is also the wider public literature of the context; various Government reports, research publications, books and articles on theory and practice - the professional discourse of the field. The study rests on the premise that learning is both personal and social, constructed idiosyncratically but often (although by no means always) within the public sphere and through public processes. The aim is to describe these processes and construct a holistic understanding of adult learning in context. For this reason, the study has wide boundaries, parameters broad enough to allow global interpretations.

Using a wide-angle lens on the world enables the study to take account of post-modern understandings and world views. Law, for instance, argues:

> Scientific observations and scientific discoveries are almost always processes. In particular they almost always involve something much more active on the part of the discoverer - a lot of work, discussion, and agonizing - in which there is interaction between scientists and what they are studying. And, since there is interaction, and that interaction takes place in a social context, discoveries are almost always controversial too: the business of labelling a discovery as a discovery takes time, effort and negotiation. And if all these processes don't seem to be processes then this is because of a surrounding network of assumptions - the fact that 'everyone' who is relevant takes (for instance) certain theories, methodologies and forms of instrumentation for granted ... It is useful I think, to note that what we call 'data' and 'interpretations of the data' ... are the product of a process in which both simplification and translation play heroic roles. (Law 1994, p.48)

Law's work highlights the interpretive nature of inquiry - even where this is not apparently the case. He reminds us that the world is rarely what it seems at first glance; it is rarely as simple, rarely as neat, as some would have us believe. He argues that:

> ...the social, all the social world, is complex and messy. Indeed this book is all about complexity, mess, or as I would prefer to say, heterogeneity. Pools of order are illusory, but even such illusions are the exception. They do not last for long. They are pretty limited. And they are the product, the outcome, or the effect, of a lot of work - work that may occasionally be more or less successfully hidden behind an appearance of ordered simplicity. So the book is about ordering rather than order. And it's about heterogeneity rather than purity. (Law 1994:5)

This thesis is similarly about ordering rather than order. It is about the ordering of experience, the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966) associated with the professional practice of adult education (in particular, but not exclusively, adult literacy education) through the 1980s - and into the '90s. It is about trying to make sense of what Schon (1987) calls the swamp within which professional practice is conducted.

The wide-angle lens also brings to bear notions of discourse theory and ideas about the ways in which prevailing social and political beliefs (which are manifested in various ways and through diverse media) impinge upon the everyday life and work of individuals, including teachers, learners, readers, writers and researchers. The work of writers such as Gee (1992, 1994), Graff (1987), Cook-Gumperz (1986), Street (1984), Edelsky (1991) and Giroux (1983) is relevant here. Their insights suggest the profoundly social nature of the learning process and the extent to which we are each shaped by the sociocultural and historical context we inhabit. Gee notes:

> The major theme of this book has been that, in our everyday lives and in much traditional psychology, what we think of as 'mental' is, in fact, 'social'. Meaning and memory, believing and knowing, are social practices that vary as they are embedded within different Discourses within a society. Each Discourse apprentices its members and 'disciplines' them so that their mental networks of associations and their folk theories converge towards a 'norm' reflected in the social practices of the Discourse. (Gee 1992, p.141)

However true this might be, this thesis suggests that such processes are neither simple nor straightforward. They are, as Law notes, 'messy', contradictory and contested in various ways. However much learning may be social, it is also profoundly personal and idiosyncratic. Whilst the world impinges from 'outside' the learner, it seems to me there are also things going on 'inside' the learner which are uniquely his or hers. Notions of personal stance, and the personal constructs we all carry seem to be useful ways of talking about what is going on for the individual. Kelly (1955) and others building on his theory such as Bannister (1985), Bannister and Fransella (1986) and Salmon (1980, 1988, 1989) suggest useful ways to consider this notion of idiosyncrasy in learning.

Not so much a conclusion as a temporary closure

All this leads not so much to a conclusion as to a temporary point of closure.

This research poses a set of interrelated questions about adult learning, adult literacy and the practice of adult literacy education. One of the key questions could be framed as: What does it mean to be literate? It is a question that cannot be answered with any finality. The debate is ongoing. As Knoblauch says:

> ... no definition tells, with ontological or objective reliability, what literacy is, definitions only tell what some person or group - motivated by political commitments - wants or needs literacy to be. (Knoblauch 1990*)*

It is hoped that this study, reflective and hermeneutic in nature, will provide insights into the living definitions of literacy which prevail for one teacher-researcher-practitioner. By reframing the definitions as social constructions in particular contexts, it aims to throw light on how these 'definitions' came to be. As such, the study may also throw light on the processes by which such understandings (and commensurate practices) come to be embedded and accepted in the field as 'natural' and inevitable. Questioning that which is often framed as natural and inevitable is surely an ongoing responsibility for those committed to research and to critical literacy.

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This collection of papers is aimed at researchers, research students and research supervisors who are interested in qualitative research into facilitated adult learning in the workplace, in formal education programs, in professional development and in community settings.

Four of the major emphases in contemporary qualitative research practice in adult education: attending to social context and critical analysis, discourse based research, phenomenological accounts and a range of action based projects in action research, evaluation and reflection appear to different degrees in the twenty essays in this volume and are used as major headings to structure the collection.

The first group shows increased understanding of the contextualised nature of human knowing and learning and the emergence of ways to incorporate this insight into research practice.

The second is concerned with forms of qualitative interpretation incorporating approaches such as: individual self reporting, human situational experience and narratives and forms of discourse analysis.

The third explores approaches to phenomenological research as a way to express and portray the 'whatness' of human lived human experience. This approach has already occurred in nursing research where the phenomenological approach has served to portray and account for the reality of nursing experience. Such research has stood against and problematised more distant managerial accounts of nursing practice constructed by observers and administrators. As the accounts in this volume show, the same service has been offered by phenomenological researchers in adult education and their portrayals of the lived experience of adult educatation practice claim a similar parity of esteem with the accounts of administrators and evaluators.

The fourth group shows the increased sophistication and comprehensiveness of adult education research practice. Researchers are now bringing the research work of knowledge creation and critique into more and more parts of adult education practice from course design and collaboration to evaluation and a range of reflective and reflexive practices.

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ISBN 1 86355 056 9

David Lovell Publishing

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Title: Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education

Author(s): Willis, P & Neville B

Corporate Source: David Lovell Publications

Publication Date: 1996

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